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A magazine of the performing arts. February 1981 \$1.95*

Theatre Australia

ADELAIDE DANCE
THEATRE —
EXPANDING
THEIR OPERATIONS

WHERE IS OPERA
HEADING IN
THE EIGHTIES

ADELAIDE STC'S
BIG GAMBLE

QUOS WRITER
IN PERTH

SHIMROD'S
CONTROVERSIAL
NEW PLAY

Ray Barrett as
Robbo in the ABC's
Sporting Chance

TV DRAMA
1981



THE SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

presents

THE MAN FROM MUKINUPIN

by DOROTHY HEWETT

Music composed by
JIM COTTER

Directed by
RODNEY FISHER

Starring in alphabetical order:

RUTH CRACKNELL
MAGGIE DENCE
JUDI FARR
COLIN FRIELS
JOHN GADEN
RON HADDRICK
JANE HARDERS
NONI HAZLEHURST



Set by
SHAUN
GURTON

Musical direction by
SARAH
DE JONG

Lighting by
NIGEL
LEVINGS

Design co-ordination by
MELODY
COOPER

Costumes by
ANNA
SENIOR

Choreography by
CHRISTINE
KOLTAI

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE Drama Theatre
February 5 to March 18

Theatre Australia

FEBRUARY 1981, VOLUME 2, NO. 2

DEPARTMENTS

3/COMMENT

4/INFO

5/WHISPERS, RUMOURS AND FACTS/*Norman Kneeb*

45/GUIDE/*Theatre Opera Dance*

SPOTLIGHT

11/ARMFIELD — ADELAIDE'S BIG GAMBLE

12/1981 PERTH FESTIVAL — A GOOD ONE

15/THE CHOIR

16/AUSTRALIAN DANCE THEATRE — EXPANDING ITS OPERATION/*Michael Morley*

FEATURE

18/TELEVISION DRAMA 1981/*Michael Hahensee*

FILM

24/THE CLUB, PATTY FINN/*Elizabeth Riddell*

INTERNATIONAL

35/USA/CHARMED CIRCLE/*Karl Lenz*

36/UK/OLD ACTORS NEVER DIE/*Irving Wardle*

37/ITI/FUTURE HAPPENINGS ABROAD

DANCE

28/ANNA KARENINA AND CINDERELLA/*William Sheasbridge*

OPERA

31/GYPSY BARON AND THE FUTURE FOR OPERA/*Ken Hestley*

REVIEWS

33/ACT/*Marguerite Wells*

34/NSW/CELLULOID HEROES, A VERY GOOD YEAR/*John McCallum*

35/THE PRECIOUS WOMAN/*Michelle Field*

36/A SHAKESPEARE COMPANY/*Dennis Biggins*

37/GOLDEN PATHWAY ANNUAL/*Tony Barclay*

38/YOU, THE NIGHT AND THE HOUSE WINE/*Barry O'Connor*

39/QLD/ERROL FLYNN/*Jeremy Pilgman*

CRUSHED BY DESIRE/*Dan Ratchelor*

40/SA/A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY, TALLEY'S FOLLY, THE CHRISTIAN BROTHER/*Michael Morley*

41/VIC/THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER/*Colin Duckworth*

42/NED KELLY'S SISTERS' TRAVELLING CIRCUS/*Suzanne Spenser*

43/WA/YANITIES/*Cliff Gilson*

BOOKS

44/TRAVELLING NORTH/*John McCallum*

errol bray's
the choir



performed by david atkins simon bu
rke tyler coppin jim holt peter kowi
tz tony sheldon david slingsby direc
tor neil armfield designer eamon d'a
rcy lighting peter smith in associatio
n with shopfront theatre at nimrod

COMMENT

Assessment — not ASIO

Artistic worth is a difficult quality to assess, but to do so is an activity which reviewers, critics, academics, artists, producers and entrepreneurs all attempt, for differing reasons. In this age of publicly qualitative assessment is also something that funding bodies have the responsibility to undertake, especially when the ever increasing demands for money have to be met by a diminishing yearly total.

In the theatre world it is well known that funding bodies, state and federal, scrutinise very carefully the financial progress of theatre companies and relate grants to economic management and good husbandry, the permanent staff of agencies like the Australia Council Theatre Board have between them a high level of knowledge and qualifications in the areas of economics and accounting. But what of the artistic side of an artist's or company's work, how is that audited?

For the last three years the Theatre Board has been working at a scheme of assessment which involves some 250 personnel around the country. This group is composed of theatre practitioners, directors, critics and intelligent members of the general public; a different two or three of them attend each production of every selected theatre company and then file reports to the Theatre Board. At the end of the year the Australia Council staff work through the reports and, this year for the first time, send a general summary, in confidence, to the company concerned for their interest and comments.

The new practice, designed to stimulate discussion and communication between the companies and the Theatre Board, ran into some bad press before Christmas when Alastair Duncan was criticised as artistic director from the Marston Street Theatre. Duncan feels that the Theatre Board assessment's criticism of Marston Street productions led the board of the company to discuss him as an appointment to the Australia Council. The complaints he then levelled at the assessment scheme were against the anonymity of the assessors and the consequent inability of the companies to judge their qualifications and possible prejudices. He also claimed that the Theatre Board wanted Marston Street to change its policy from one of light, boulevard theatre to more serious and experimental work, when under his directorship audiences had risen from 39% to 65% (and 60% for musicals).

In fact the Theatre Board had told Marston Street a year in advance that they were planning to phase out their funding after 1980, but refused an application and put the company under review rather than on notice. The Theatre Board made a point of saying they do not try to influence a theatre company's artistic policy, but make their assessment in terms of the stated policy of the theatre. In the case of Marston Street any criticism was apparently not of what was done, but of how well or otherwise it was done. They say they did not request or in any way seek to influence the dismissal of Alastair Duncan.

But however well intentioned and effective the assessment scheme may be — and apparently most theatre companies have given very positive responses to it, requesting only more detail — the anonymity of the assessors does leave a substantial area open to attack from people who may feel wronged by the reports.

The reasons for not revealing any names are partly obvious, like restaurant reviewers, assessors want to not a production or company under normal circumstances and not be worded or reduced into appraisal. Equally, the Theatre Board staff agree, who would expect to be an assessor if theatre companies knew what they were up to?

Even a single list of all assessors' names, with no details of attendance at specific productions, available only on request, could be too dangerous the Theatre Board believe. Although certain members of the Theatre Board are themselves assessable practitioners and do have full knowledge of the activities of all assessors.

Certainly protection of assessors is important, but such a degree of secrecy could lead to assessments of a Theatre Board ASIO: of a government body being less than open and above board, and any number of suspicions about the competence and prejudice of assessors.

The Theatre Board must be applauded for and encouraged in its efforts to measure artistic quality in the fairest and best way, but it is to be hoped that for its own sake, it takes every precaution against anything that could be seen to be secretive or underhand.

One does not doubt the integrity of the Theatre Board, but the lives of companies and people are at stake, and it is important that just one should not only be done, but also be seen to be done.



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I N F O

NIGEL TRIFFIT'S ELECTRIFYING ODYSSEY RETURNS

Mommie's Little Horror Show, the highly successful adult puppet spectacular has returned to the Last Laugh in Melbourne, for a season next season. The show attained almost mythical status after its last season there, it still holds the Last Laugh's box office record and hundreds of people were turned away.

Mommie's was originally created by Nigel Triffit in 1976 at the now defunct Tasmanian Puppet Theatre, the board of which has made available the props and puppets for the new season. In Hobart it was originally only forty minutes long, and grew to full length for its tour of Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Inverness. Triffit calls this version *Mommie's* Mib 6 and says every detail has been fine-tuned with some twelve minutes of new sequences added.

The rebuilding and reworking of *Mommie's* has taken six months and has also resulted in the formation of a new company, The Australian Puppet Theatre, which may lay claim to being the adult puppet company. It has recruited members of the old Tasmanian Puppet Theatre, many of whom were no longer working in puppetry: Frank Italiano, Patric de Pau (Pat Woolcock), Winston Appleby and Fred Wallner.

After producing *Wylwera* at the Edinburgh Festival for the Australian Dance Theatre, Nigel Triffit met up with John Pinder at Amsterdam where they planned the new season (and Triffit managed to get recognised in a row). Following Melbourne an extensive European tour is planned, but not yet finalised.



The Amazing Mommie's Little Horror Show
Photo: G. Harrison

A particular coup for Triffit, ADT's *Wylwera* will be running in Melbourne concurrently with *Mommie's* in late Feb.

MORE MUKINUPIN

With productions last year in Perth and Adelaide, Dorothy Hewett's *Man From Mukinupin* starts 1981 with two productions opening within a week of each other this month. The Sydney Theatre Company's, directed by Rodney Fisher starts on February 3, and the Melbourne Theatre Company's on February 11, directed by Judith Alexander.

Rodney Fisher is an experienced Hewett director, and feels that *Mukinupin* is to



Next *Mukinupin* plays Patti Perkins (seen in STC's *Man From Mukinupin*)

date her most mature poetic drama, because the drama not only uses her recent experience, but into the background and mythology of her childhood in the wheat-belt of WA. It therefore has the depth of grassroots knowledge and feeling as well as the full range of poetry and experience.

Fisher feels he has learnt from the history of the show to date, that it is less of a musical than has been understood in other productions, the music is more used to extend the images and sprang out of the action. Some songs were especially written in Perth to fill out the musical ideas, and Rodney Fisher is dropping one new one — a duet between Jack and Mercy — and returning a duet for Polly and Cecil back to a solo for Cecil. He would like the audience to see there's a level in the play beyond the obvious one of music, and light and dark, for him this play, more than any of Hewett's previous ones, captures that moment of puberty, when the innocence of childhood is clouded by a new awareness and all the threats that go with it.

Judith Alexander is now to directing Dorothy Hewett but is happy to be backed up by a woman playwright, designer, Anna French, composer Elizabeth Riek, and the female performance in the cast. This wasn't, however, a policy decision, each was chosen individually.

In Sydney Noah Hardham will recreate her original performance as Polly Lilly, Colin Fuchs plays Jack. Mercy and the cast includes John Gaden, Ruth Crookwell and Ron Haddock.

NEXT ADELAIDE FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

Australian stage director Elagh Mostashiry has been appointed Artistic Director of the 1984 Adelaide Festival. He will take up his appointment at the end of the '82 Festival. By announcing the appointment so early the Festival Board are in effect giving Mostashiry officially accredited status to begin the planning and negotiation with in advance.

Elagh Mostashiry's most recent connection with Adelaide was as producer of the AD's *Baron Godwin* which was presented at the Festival Theatre in November. He also produced *Wormhole* for the AD which premiered at the 1976 Festival.

He is a graduate of Melbourne University, and studied for three years in History at Monash. In 1970 he went to study for a doctorate at Oxford and directed with the Oxford and Cambridge Shakespeare Society. General Director of Covent Garden, Sir John Toulley, saw his *As You Like It* and invited Mostashiry to join the Royal Opera in 1973 as Resident Associate Producer.



Elagh Mostashiry

Since then he has worked with the RSC (*Travellers*) at Covent Garden, with the AO, at the National Theatre in London, Netherlands Opera and in the USA. Last year he also directed AO's *Mid-Then Ends Well* for the BBC Shakespeare series and will be doing 4 *Midwinter Nights* at Devereux this year.

Jon Sharron is also very pleased at Elijah Moshinsky's appointment, having made clear from the start that he would only be involved for one festival.

EVITA INTO SYDNEY

In spite of the full houses that continued until the very end of the Melbourne season, the *Evita* company are looking forward to their move into Sydney for the final season. For many of them it will be a return home after nine months of touring. Jennifer Murphy, Tony Alvarez and Peter Carrelli are all Sydney-siders, as is Marlene Ruggs who will also be seeking into married life for the first time — she disappeared for a weekend to get married between the Perth and Melbourne seasons.

Laura Mitchell, who plays Poon's mistress, will be coming home to Sydney as a fully-fledged actress — she last worked there as a receptionist at the Kingsgate Hotel. Having done a little amateur acting



Jennifer Murphy — *Evita* she asked Larry Fuller, while he and Hal Prince were staying at the Kingsgate during the matinees, how she would go about auditioning. Although they had officially closed they agreed to see her, and Laura went straight into a major role.

Like everywhere else the bookings for Sydney are rolling in and had reached 30,000 by the first week of January (opening night is February 14), which meant that already forty performances were fully booked. London producer David Land will be at the Sydney opening along with writer Tim Rice. Hal Prince may be able to make it, and confirmation is still awaited on whether Robert Stigwood will be there. If all goes well, *Evita* should run for about one year at the Sydney Her Majesty's.

ENSEMBLE 21ST ANNIVERSARY

Sydney's Ensemble Theatre celebrated its twenty-first birthday in January with the opening of its latest production, *Drunk*. The company is still in the converted bushsheds it started in, on Milson's Point, but the sketch shows how architect Alan Williams sees the new look Ensemble, for which final fitting is in progress at the moment.

Hayes Gordon, one of the seniors who started the second oldest rep company in

work by himself and to achieve a creative state in performance, to give him a vision that will raise his standards, and to give him a respect for his work that will support him through his career."

The first batch of official 3rd Year students will be presenting a showing of the *Laban* work at the Seymour Centre in the first two weeks of February.

OLD OPERA RUMBLINGS

The early nights for Opera in Brisbane are a new beginning. The old Queensland Opera Company has, in the last month,



Australia, is still its artistic director, and claims that in 1958 these original enthusiasts "felt the need to do."

"Audiences were disappointed on barely gap. Talents were drawing away from Australia. Godes refused to arrive with brand new theatres and heaps of acting roles. Our own artistic standards justified the personal apology. 'But we're only a young country' In some each of these issues has improved — even if the actors had to provide our own theatres. There should be no doubt that the Ensemble contributed substantially towards these improvements."

THE DRAMA STUDIO

The Drama Studio Sydney Ltd (formerly the Nurend Acting School), is now entering its fifth year of successful operations. The school incorporates three approaches to an actors training: the Stanislavski method, which is explored in the acting class, and forms the basis for work on texts; Rudolf Laban, through whose observations of movement European modern dance found direction — his findings have been applied to actors by Ysa Malmgren, to whom Laban entrusted his final work; and Michael St Denis, an exploration of style, incorporating mask work. Students also follow classes in movement, mime, singing and voice.

The School's directors are Tim Robbins and Anthony Knight who both studied with Ysa Malmgren at the Drama Centre, London. There are a "to equip the actor to

been killed off — stabbed in the back as supporters are trying in a flurry of unopposed letters to the press.

There have been rumblings for several years as the Company found itself in continual financial embarrassment but pleaded that if standards were to be maintained it needed subsidies to match those of other companies elsewhere (always a difficult claim to assess when there are hidden costs, like orchestras and theatre charges involved). The Department of Cultural Activities can point to a special income grant (rumour has it is \$150,000) in the past year, and its efforts to restructure the Board of the Opera. However, that Board was given precious little time to achieve anything before the axe fell and many of its members are understandably angry.

Meanwhile, the semi-professional Queensland Light Opera Company has been mounting ever more ambitious seasons and taking steps into the grand opera field. As the Opera Company faltered, that led to become the State company and take up residence in the new Cultural Centre increased in confidence.

An enforced amalgam is now being attempted with representatives from the two companies on a new board. The task is formidable because there is a residue of ill-will, but such a marriage between the old Festival of Arts and Warana boards has worked very well. The future of opera in Queensland depends on rejecting the mistake.

by Don Batchelor

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(Winner of the 1980 Business in the Arts Award for
the best Sponsorship of the Arts outside the
Metropolitan areas of the Capital Cities)

AWARD TO ROBYN ARCHER

The Sydney Critics Circle award for 1980 went to Robyn Archer — presented at the ceremony on January 19th at the Theatre Royal. As she is overseas, Rodney Fisher collected the award on her behalf, as Director of Archer's *Songs From Shakespeare: Aids*. She won the award for writing that, and for performances in *Tonight's Lulu*.



Blas and A Star Is Born

Very close contenders for the Award were John Bell, followed by Neil Harcourt and George Hinchenson Les Marinas. Also nominated were Neil Armfield and Brian Staps.

The members of the Critics' Circle are Henry Kippax (Chairman), John West, Katherine Brisbane, Robert Page, Norman Kessel, Michael Le Morgan, Harry Robinson, Tally Davies, Bill Coomer and Frank Harris.

NIMROD CHANGES

It's not only the departure of Neil Armfield (see Spotlight) and the arrival of Aubrey Miller as the latest artistic director, that is causing changes at Nimrod, there's movement right through the company.

Marge Wright, previously Senior Stage Manager, has replaced Catherine Murray (another defector to the State Theatre Company of SA) as Production Manager. Marge left the Flindersstage management course to go to the Hunter Valley Theatre Company in Newcastle and then moved to



Marge Wright

Nimrod four years ago. Since then she has worked on most of their shows *Uptown and Downstairs* including the tour of *Excursion of Benjamin Franklin* with Gordon Chater. Replacing her as Senior Stage Manager is John Woodland, also lately from the NIVC, and lately from Flinders University.

Christine Downy has taken over from Ailsa Carpenter in the Publicity Department, she comes from five years publicity work in Sydney, mainly in the media. — film and recording, and originally from New Zealand.

NIMROD AND PAUL ILES

Ailsa Carpenter writes:

In all the words that have been written and publicly spoken re Nimrod's tenth birthday celebration, the name of Paul Iles, their General Manager for three of those ten years, has not been mentioned. I appreciate that the emphasis has been on those who started the theatre but nevertheless when summing up the history of Nimrod, Paul Iles' huge contributions to their success should be in the record books.

I quote from Henry Kippax's article (*Theatre Australia* Dec Jan) "Success flowed, above all, from their entrepreneurial enterprise—nerve and flair, etc." These words particularly apply to Paul his touring of productions overseas put the name of Nimrod on the international map, an exciting step forward for all those artistically involved and for all Australian theatre generally.

As the profession's national magazine I think this a fitting place to record thanks to an adventurous visionary.

AUSTRALIAN DRAMA FESTIVAL

The Australian song-and-dance man is the proud new logo for the Australian Drama Festival to be held in Adelaide from April 2-20. More than thirty companies from all over Australia will be taking part in this biennial event, which is billed as "a celebration of indigenous Australian drama, and a promotion of our multi-cultural identity." Unlike the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the ADI is a home-grown event, with all the productions written, directed and performed by Australians and sold new.

The Festival programme will be announced early this month, and will include street, conventional, historical, pub, ethnic, late-night, Aboriginal, women's and music theatre in a variety of venues around the Festival city.

There will be a fulltime playwright-in-residence working with a group of young people throughout the Festival, and a day-long Forum discussion on Easter Sunday with a number of well-known and controversial speakers. Topics for discussion

include "The Smell of the Crowd" (for Audience Connection), "Yeah, but waddy do for a Real Job?" (for Training for the Future) and "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow" (for Theatre Is and For the Future).

The Festival will culminate with a riotous weekend bash, including an 'event' at a winery, a grand bush dance and a closing night showcase of arena-grade entertainment!



Australian Drama Festival

The home-grown one

ADELAIDE

APRIL 2-20, 1981

Nineteen days of professional standard stage, radio and television drama plus forums, music, outdoor events, exhibitions, reviews, competitions, playwrights-in-residence and special screenings. Street, conventional, historical, pub, ethnic, late-night, kids, Aboriginal, women's and music theatre in venues and places all over Adelaide.

Acceleration of indigenous Australian Drama and a promotion of our multi-cultural identity.

All enquiries to Christopher Jones, Coordinator, Australian Drama Festival, Adelaide, 11 Jeffcott Street, North Adelaide. Phone (08) 267 5111.

A festival between the festivals. The Australian Drama Festival is a project of the Association of Community Theatres and is supported by the South Australian Government through the Department for the Arts.



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WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS



By Norman Krasell

Need (Let's Hear It For The Musical) Fender's long-promised inaugural revival of *White Horse* (on due to surface at last, but only just before next Christmas. Sponsored by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, it will open a 12-week season at Sydney's Regent Theatre on November 18, immediately following the Australian Ballet's season there with *Swan Lake*).

White Horse may well be one of the Trust's major operations for 1981, others being the Australia-wide tour of David Williamson's somewhat flawed *Collected Works*, the long-awaited Australian production of *White Life Is A Journey* and a visit to Sydney and Queensland by the Australian Dance Theatre. In Sydney the ADT will stage an elaborate production, of *Waltz*, but this is too complicated to take on tour, so Queensland will be using other items from the company's repertoire. Queensland will also see a revival of *The Gin Game* with Leonard Teale in the role of the crookily old man originally played here by Ron Huddock.

Still on the Trust drawing board are a Sydney season and a tour with the Q Theatre's big 1980 success, *Pendere Repetido*, for which a suitable venue is still being sought; the London success *Sage Bruck* (by Simon Gray) awaiting the simultaneous availability of the right cast and the right theatre; and *Amadeus* (by Peter Shaffer) about which talks are in progress on the possibility of bringing out the full London National Theatre production. If this cannot be organised, the Trust will stage an all-Australian production, but neither of the latter two plays are likely to be seen till early 1982.

Another very interesting possibility for the Trust is a new Athol Fugard play, *A Lesson From Albert*, which opened on Broadway last November to ecstatic reviews. "Early the outstanding play of the season, maybe several seasons", "An eloquent, passionate drama about the human cost of social injustice", "Maybe the best play yet from this author".

A three-hander, it's about a final meeting between a slaveholder whose African and his British-born wife, with a black activist colleague just out of prison and about to emigrate to England with his family to escape official persecution. The play's title refers to the African's collection of alien plants which serve as a metaphor for the toughness of man.

The black man's sense of guilt about leaving his homeland coupled with suspicions that his white friend may have been a police informer, suspenses the what was a too proud to die, lead to what Fugard's critic describes as "a teaching and uncompromising class".

As I hear it, we may see this around August with - who else? - Olive Radli as the woman. Olive and husband Anthony Wheeler are Australia's outstanding interpreter of Fugard characters, as demonstrated in *Boysen and Lena Helms* and *Goodbye and Goodbye*.

Members of *Boysen and Goodbye* recall the stunning performance given by Linda Blair with Anthony Wheeler in the first Sydney production of this work and many will welcome the accomplished actress's return from New York to again make Sydney her home base. She quickly rejoined former partner Ron Fennar and re-established their production company, *Studio Sydney*. They gave a taste of their programming with rehearsed readings at the Wapide Chapel Theatre of *Criss From A Cold Aquarium* by John (The Workhorse) Upton, and *I Can't Imagine Tomorrow* by Tennessee Williams. These were followed by a lively discussion with the audience.

They have now joined the Wapide Chapel Theatre from May to December this year for regular monthly production of what they call "chamber theatre". They will revive Baskett's *Mappo Dora*, which they did together at the Wapide in 1967, and Tennessee Williams' *Summer Last Summer*. Other productions will include the premiere of an American comedy, *Twigs*, by George Fennell, *Chickadee In Love*, a new play by Australian writer Tom Ruskfield, the Sydney premiere of Vincenzo's *Reason*, a thriller by Ira Levin and the world premiere of *Don't See This World*, a drama by Tom Kempinski.

One project the Elizabethan Trust has relinquished is the *Waterhouse and Hall* 1977 adaptation of *Fuente de Orophea*'s comedy. *Fuente* is now back where it began here, with Peter Williams. Diana Clements has agreed to star, but all depends on getting the right theatre at a time the actress is available. Williams says if he can't do it this year, he too will abandon it.

Meanwhile, Williams' relationship of the Phillip Playhouse, to which he has returned its original and more famous title, the *Phillip Street Theatre*, is virtually

complete with improved seating in a raised aisle arena, improved stage lighting and facilities, well-appointed dining room, new bar office and candy bar in the foyer, the lot.

The premises now house all Peter's activities, including his talent agency, *Central Casting* and his *Young People's Drama School*. His highly successful school programmes for 1981 include a revival of *Henry IV, Part 1* in June and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, another syllabus play, in July and August. In May school holiday parties, from May 2 to 23, will be *David Williamson*.

Who's Afraid will be at Mandy Made Loft has been visited *London Our Presence* (with a Ron Fraser, Lee Young and Maggie Stuart). It opens Feb 4.

The Sydney production of *The Boy Meeting Our Song* opened three weeks ahead of the London version, but the Sydney production of *The Boy Meeting Our Song* was almost six months ahead of London. It's scheduled to open at Drury Lane on Feb 23.

A true story. On the opening night of Johnny Lockwood's Christmas show at his Wapide Ballroom, a woman with a party from a large department store told him she had enjoyed the programme, but that he would not get the "youngest in" "My son wouldn't come," she said. "He'd come if you had Neil Diamond on 'Straight Ahead', Johnny explained that Diamond had other commitments, "I did approach Sinatra, but he demanded a 60-piece orchestra and I have only two," said Johnny. "Yes, I see," said the woman, equally straightened.

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SPOTLIGHT

Armfield — Adelaide's big gamble

Robert Page assessed the recent
STC turmoil.

The State Theatre Company of South Australia has been in some turmoil for a few months now, a turmoil exacerbated by repeated attacks from the press. First it was announced that Nick Enright would not "exercise his option to extend his contract beyond mid 1981" and later that Kevin Palmer was to follow suit.

There were rumours that even Paul Iles, generally considered Australia's most brilliant and innovative administrator, was unsafe in the general manager's seat and that he might make the split of those at the top in the STC complete.

But out of all this has emerged a plan of greater audacity than many could have imagined. One of Australia's youngest directors, Neil Armfield, currently of Nimrod, has been appointed as single artistic supremo. So daring is it that, with the Board's necessary compliance, it has all the hallmarks of an ill-conceived coup.

It was he who first spotted Armfield at Sydney University when he was directing *Bertholdesens Fair* for SUIS and brought him to the attention of the Nimrod directorate. "You could say Paul has been a key figure," admits Armfield, "so long as that doesn't carry the connotation of anything shonky." Iles remains as General Manager at STC, but one feels he is now more out on a limb than ever before in his career.

In Adelaide the risks are all the greater. South Australia is significantly left out of the Sydney-Melbourne axis. Despite claims to being the Athens of the South and have unquestionably had the dynamism to establish the major arts

festival of the southern hemisphere, it has so far failed to turn the cultural axis into a triangle.

Perhaps it takes its art too seriously, setting them on a pedestal which, far from making them secure, forces upon them impossible ideals which sound reasoning would suggest were impossible to attain, by and large even back in classical times.

The place has been compared to a renaissance city state where wealth allows largesse. But the city patrons of the arts squint on the committments, bastions of conservatism and bourgeois values. Sadly the burghers seem unable to judge what they indulge. Christopher Hunt suspected that the

Festival was no argument against bourgeois thinking, rather it confirmed it. So long as internationally prestigious avant garde artists only visit Adelaide once every two years, and then not for too long, all is well. One thinks of the impact the Berliner Ensemble made on British theatre in 1956 and feels that the same thing in Adelaide would have had little lasting influence.

The local press align itself with the same viewpoint. It is at its most dangerous when it sets itself up as an increasingly docile guardian of the city's culture (see box).

The burghers and the press in concert have been proved wrong by



The Pinchbox Adelaide Festival Centre



Neil Armfield

history in most of the major scandals. It was they who put Patrick White off playwrighting for over a decade, they who withdrew *The One Day of the Year*, and they who were responsible for the martyrdom of St Christopher (Hunt). Now it seems the press must take a deal of the responsibility for the exit of Enright and Palmer. A major fault was seen to be their emphasis on Australian content — a policy which in fact followed the side of the rest of the country. In this case their hostility by the press and premature condemnation brought Richard Wherrett to the defence, arguing that "the evolution of new policies and their realisation in depth takes time."

certainly more than one season of six months" (*The Advertiser*, Letters 4.12.80.)

Ministers read the papers, and even if the artistic decisions jumped and were not pushed, the blood letting to appease the body politic has happened.

Whatever the vices or virtues of the outgoing regime, what they were set upon was time, yet if the STC is not to fall into disarray again before the end of 1981 it is time that must be given to Neil Armfield. Soundly, his contract (in line with Wherrett's views) gives him three years — but the question is



Paul Mees

Adelaide press pique

by Michael Morley

One of the more unfortunate legacies of Colin George's rise at the STC has been the fact that *The Advertiser's* Theatre critic, Alan Roberts, now finds himself casted from a position close to the monarch's ear. At the time George left, one could safely bet that even Roberts' review would produce a new combination of tired superlatives so much so that the uninitiated reader might well think the company and its shows for should really have its home in *The Advertiser* or *Circle in the Square*. But the palatine and plots of the new regime — Kevin Palmer, Nick Enright and Paul Mees — have left Roberts disheartened and without a hobby horse. The old comfortable Brook rap approach of George — for whose productions this critic had little use — is now being handed as a golden age of Utopian drama now.

Chances a son gone, one might say. But then, in late November, *The Advertiser* published a half-page fit of pique by Roberts (repeating the paper's editorial columns) in which he accused the STC of being engaged in a "con job", suggested that Palmer ought to resign, maintained that he found Lilli "lame" (that he is good company with the reviews from 1980) and stated that Peter Brook did "wonderful theatrical produc-

tions on a shoe-string budget". (Roberts' an awareness of the source and use of Brook's Ford Foundation funding seems likely to be the least.)

Throughout the article one searched in vain for some substantive contribution to the debate about where the STC is going. Roberts seems appalled at the thought of Armfield *plus ça*, or the fact that the STC is not doing the classic plays of the world repertoire (let another *Samson*, *Macbeth*, a *new School for Scandal*, a *comical Cherry Orchard*) — all plays Colin George has done and will continue to do.

Now, no one would claim that the 1980 season has been an unqualified success, but at least the new pods at the STC has brought about more production of Australian works, a move to alternative venues (Theatre 82) and a sense that the audience might actually be engaged with what they are seeing. There have been some misadventures and flops — *The Float* being a prime example. But the seems to far outweigh the deficits. It is a pity he ignores to see Mr Roberts' spending more time writing the plays and moving to venues with what they can than in ensuring sound backstage valuing the going with which he loved his article ("circumstantial information", "told by one person of some experience") in the journal of *Governments* funding arts such self-selling is only deterministic.

rather of how long the town will allow him to settle into the job.

Who is this twenty-five year old whose entrance rise has outstripped even the bravest speculations (it's hard to believe that it's less than eighteen months since he directed his first professional production)? Armfield strikes me as a person with a wisdom beyond his years, counteracted only slightly by a youthful glow which is betrayed every now and then in a boyish grin. He turns himself up well. "I'm fairly calm, I don't get thrown, though I find it hard to make decisions (he pondered the STC offer for a month) and I sometimes go under a bit. I have a passion for enjoying myself — but I don't do that easily."

As a director he is noted for productions of great style (the plastic in perfection), but as one senior critic put it, an ability which tends to gloss over the faults in a play rather than confront and overcome them. His reputation is of someone who works well with actors and writers and he sees that ability as the key to success.

"I think the most valuable work comes from a group of people who share interests to the extent where they can challenge each other in the rehearsal situation where the responsibility is shared by all the actors, the director, designer and the writer combined — when you've got that working, when the actors are performing and they know where they're heading for — in some sense they own the performance."

So in Adelaide he wants to challenge the idea of the one-man-band it has been in the past. "It has happened too often that a single person has been at the top — and because they're in the limelight and responsible they feel frightened. The more the focus is on you the less you can afford to take risks."

Armfield is no arrogant young egotist out for the main chance. On the contrary he admits his lack of experience and is looking to share the responsibility of the company the way he shares the responsibility of a production. "I'm not the kind of person who can operate by myself, I don't know enough to begin with, I haven't read enough, I haven't done enough and I haven't got enough

(Continued page 10)

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1981 Perth Festival: A good one

In previous years, and especially those alternate ones when Adelaide is also festiving, the Festival of Perth has been the first, but not the only venue for its international guests. Perth has been the fanfare and the opening night for many — such as Derek Jacobs and the Old Vic Company, the New York Acting Company, Cathy Dessens, Spike Milligan and Gaele May — who have then gone on to national tours in as many state capitals as possible. This year, perhaps in an effort to draw more people to Perth itself and give the Festival a greater exclusiveness, the rest of the country will not be getting the chance to see some of the major attractions — a great sadness, when adding on the price of an air fare would put the cost of a few nights at the theatre well out of most people's reach.

One of the highlights of the Festival, and the Festival only, will be the return

of the old Vic Theatre Company — not with the embarrassingly successful *O'Toole Macbeth* but *The Merchant of Venice* and, for light relief, *Twelfth Night* by Pinero. In 1979 the company was something of a disappointment, bringing out no solid production, but three rather patronising, festival fare "entertainments" — puns, puns, semi-documentary readings on Byron, starring Jacobs, the Grand Tour and Sidney Smith. These did the national round, to take warm receptions, but the far more interesting and well received (in London) productions of this year will sadly not venture out of WA.

Devotees of *Fewer Towers* will be especially disappointed, as the con-



FESTIVAL-OF-PERTH

comedy variation *Prunella Scales* is keeping husband Timothy West company on this tour, and has taken over the role of Portia (previously played by Maureen O'Brien) in *The Merchant*, while he plays Shylock. The two of them will also be performing a late night show at the Otago Theatre, called *Off and On* — a light-hearted look at entertainers in public and private. If that sounds like a hard-working tour, it may be that a change is as good as a rest for Prunella Scales who, on top of the role of wife and mother of two, has been starring with Leonard Rossiter in the long running comedy *Make and Break in the West End* ever since finishing the third episode of *Fewer Towers*. Apparently the series was extremely hard to make, taking absolute control to give the impression of chaotic frenzy, and Clouse was a hard task-master, insisting on absolute fidelity to his script.

Since Timothy West was last in Perth with the Old Vic, the company has undergone several changes, not the least of which was to make him artistic director in place of Toby Robertson. That shake-up was due to financial problems, and though West washed his hands of the production he must subsequently have been quietly thankful for the crowds that Peter O'Toole drew as Macbeth, for the Old Vic was hard hit in the latest British Arts Council cutbacks — so much so that their touring activities may have to be severely curtailed.

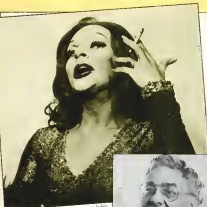
It is confusing to see that the National Theatre will be presenting Peter Shaffer's latest work, *Amadeus*,



Timothy West



Prunella Scales, playing Portia in the Old Vic's *The Merchant of Venice*



Clare Russell — puppeteer of the great Juliet of Melbourne

at the Festival, but no, it is not the London production with Paul Scofield coming out Shaffer himself, though, it is to be present for the WA National production which will star Edgar Meeville as Salieri and Robert van Mackelenberg as Mozart.

Amadeus caused a certain amount of controversy when it opened in London in 1979, because it presents Mozart not only as a musical genius, divinely inspired, but also as an infamous, foul-mouthed urchin. Like the publicity about *The Romans in Britain*, though, this did nothing but entice the public and the production is still booked out in the NT's Olivier Theatre. Debate then started on whether the play was indeed a masterpiece, as critics such as Bernard Levin claimed, or merely a middlebrow, popular spectacular, as many thought *Equus* had been.

Amadeus continues the discussion. Shaffer started in *Rosalind Wisen of the Sun* and then *Equus*, as to the existence of some kind of god, pagan, pantheistic or now, apparently, Christian. It also keeps the same structure as the previous two, the older man, acting as commentator, who is searching for meaning in life, believes



Peter Shaffer, author of *Amadeus*

he finds it embodied in a younger man, but is forced in the situation to destroy the very thing he seeks. In this case the musician, but poem composer Salieri believes that Mozart is divinely but unfairly gifted, and so destroys him as a revenge on his unjust god.

To give added irony, *Amadeus* in Perth will be part of a double bill, the other half of which will be Salieri's own short opera, *Primo Le Morte a Per le Perole* — perhaps a description of the evening as a whole.

Carrying on the dramatic concern with power, money and divinity from *The Merchant of Venice* and *Amadeus* will be Peter Wilson's production of *Faust* with the Western Australian Theatre Company. Wilson, recently artistic director of the late Tasmanian Puppet Theatre, will be using life-size puppets and contemporary and classical synthesised music. Some very

different puppets will be appearing in the Marionette Theatre's new production of *The Magic Pudding*, a new adaptation by Eleanor Whitcombe, and Perth actress Margaret Ankerell will be starring as solitaire Emily Stilton in the Arthur Koppe play *Wings*.

Alan Bura's latest play, *Duff*, is being premiered at the Festival, commissioned by the Friends of the Festival especially for the Hole in the Wall. Bura's last play, *Big River*, was commissioned and premiered at the Adelaide Festival and earned the writer and Melbourne Theatre Company, quite unfairly, nothing but scorn. Although the play went on to a very successful season in Melbourne, its projected Sydney tour was dropped like a stone. At that time Bura said he would no longer be writing modern urban comedies, but *Duff* seems to belie this, being set in a motel lobby which has been converted into a home for Matt and Liz Duff, their ill-assorted guests provide the humour and action of the piece.

I Colombones from Italy will provide further fun at the Festival — two modern day clowns who use commedia dell'arte as a basis. On the other side of the coin the Yugoslavian Zagreb Theatre Company will take from the Sydney Festival to Perth their war epic *The Liberator of Skopje*.

In addition there will be light-hearted one man evenings from American Tom Lehrer, Australian Keith Mitchell and Canadian Craig Russell, with his amazing impersonations of the great female filmstars. British comedian Mike Harding is appearing in concert, as is Irish harpist Mary O'Hara, and Marian Montgomery and Richard Rodney Bennett will be performing their *Just Friends* evening of music, song and chat.

The 1981 Festival of Perth promises to be one of the best yet, with a good balance of light and solid theatre, serious and comic work and top performers from home and overseas. It is a shame indeed that so very few will be able to take advantage of this excellent programming, perhaps if the same limitations are to be imposed in 1982, it might be worth the Festival (and certainly its potential audience's) while to arrange some cheap package with the domestic airlines.

The Choir — The Power and Pathos of Oppression

TA interviews playwright ERROL BRAY.

As a Playwrights' Conference committee meeting sometime in January 1980, the then artistic director Terence Clarke made an unusual request, formal backing for the workshopping of a play which some might find offensive. It involved homosexuality, castration and all its characters were orphan choirboys.

The Choir, by Errol Bray, like Shaffer's *Aguirre* or Martin Sherman's *Boys* (which regularly emerged from the American Playwrights' Conference) is one of those plays instantly recognisable for its strength and dramatic power. In Canberra the first workshop performance confirmed it, and proved also that the play could be successfully performed by adults — and indeed by being so add a celebration, a depth of psychological analysis and perhaps most importantly just enough of a sense of distance, where children might give it a realism too harrowing to be effective.

Within a month of Canberra, David Marr wrote a full page story on the play for the *National Times* headed "Discovered at last: Errol Bray — our best since Williamson" "Spurned" West End and Broadway awaits and the emergence of Louis Nowra, it would seem, notwithstanding Nimrod, with some justification before their world premiere in January, claimed that it was "one of Australia's most eagerly awaited theatrical events", and almost without precedent have given above-the-title billing to a playwright for his first professional production.

Through Neil Armfield's direction of the workshops and now this full production only a handful of lines have been changed — testimony to the astonishing completeness of the script from the outset. Extraordinarily too, for what is a one act play running only eighty minutes, it stands alone and in Nimrod's main theatre. As Bray

wily remarks, though, "No one is going to ask for any more."

Errol Bray's involvement in theatre properly began at the age of thirty when he entered the University of New South Wales' Drama Department and graduated in 1976. His main interest was educational drama — he had a book, *Are We There?*, published on the subject in the same year — and with a few outside engagements such as dramatic criticism for *Nation*



Errol Bray

Review his abiding interest has been his Shopfront Theatre for children. Incidentally, it was one of the kids a year or two back who brought up the historical fact, then unknown to Bray, of castration to preserve the soprano voice of young males.

For all the short, sharp, shock of the play — someone in the Playwrights' Conference compared its impact to a kick in the groin — he sees its metaphor as not shocking enough. Needless to say his view of our society, and particularly its educational but also punitive or mental health, institutions, is bleak. "The damage done to the emotional life by institutions is far worse than that done by castration."

Bray sees the play as an outcry against the pain he feels is so prevalent in the world, a pain he claims to be so sensitive to that he cannot visit classrooms and even less, staffrooms. "I could more easily accept a fascist regime" he says, "then the way things are. Hitler oppressing the Jews is horrific, but more easily fought against and therefore less intellectually frightening than a lot of what happens around us, because it is so

obvious."

The point made with the force of a ment-à-carte of the "exchange coin" — balls for votes, in the education system registration for spurious qualifications, and in the world at large work for illusory goals such as the chimera presented by the advertising industry. He follows the radical reformist ideals of Austrian educationist Ivan Illich, in his warning to dislocate education "life experience learning" from institutions, to offer choice in place of the "exchange coin." A romantic idealist, perhaps, but he believes such ideals are alive and working at his beloved Shopfront.

For Bray then, the motivating idea is not merely to create a success de scandale, though it seems set to bring him overnight recognition. He realises that staring the deepest male anxieties — fears of castration and the inverted (perverted) mother figure deadlier than the male — is the basis of the play's impact. An impact dramatically increased by the spareness of the writing, the sharpness of each scene and the tautness of the structure.

Errol Bray, pushing forty, stocky and unworldly, is a passionate man. His other plays have so far been seen in too emotional — "in the theatre not the place for emotions" he asks — but may now gain productions. Two short plays *The Farrow* and *Whom* will be toured by Shopfront next year, but *The Choir* ("more horrific than *The Choir*") about nurses in a mental hospital, *Smile* on the oppression of women and *Substratum* ("which I think is my best so far") a play about death and incorporating an affair between a forty year old woman teacher and a twelve year old boy, all await being picked up by producers.

All his plays, he says, are about oppression — all are strong stuff even for this day and age. But encapsulated even in *The Choir* is Bray's answer to the problems of the world — the simple good of love and caring. It's something he shares with the kids at his theatre.

Drop down one suspects there is a fair degree of ambition in the man, described by a student as "a great taddy bear". But his passions when forged by his undoubtedly strong dramatic sense make for theatre, as director Neil Armfield put it, "which has such confidence in why it's there."

Australian Dance Theatre — extending its activities

by Michael Morley

The sixteen-strong Australian Dance Theatre arrived back from its tour to Edinburgh and Europe on a Friday, at 9.30 on Monday morning they were back in their rehearsal rooms in Adelaide — not to assess the results of the tour or slide gradually back into things, but hard at work for their coming seasons in Melbourne and Adelaide.

There are probably few more decontaminating sights than a dance company in rehearsal. Gone are the carefully lit, remotely graceful bodies of the stage performance, in their place, sweat, effort, concentration and a collection of people who look as if they are dressed in throwouts from a bankrupt theatrical costume's. It's a bit like watching a vigorous football workout — but, instead of set moves being practised, new routines, changes of steps and rhythms are constantly being asked of the dancers.

The Company's style and usage are a reflection of the style and aims not only of its director but also of the members of the ensemble, this is no anonymous group controlled and fashioned solely by director Jonathan Taylor. Four years ago there was something of a vacuum in dance in this country now, Taylor feels that the Company is filling ground that the Australian Ballet vacated ten years ago — and how effectively can be gauged by critical response both here and in Europe. The significance of the Company's invitation to Edinburgh this year should be obvious. It is, Taylor hopes, the first step towards similar tours by the Company, already there is talk of a tour to Europe in 1982 and interest from Milan and America.

Taylor is candid about the reactions to the Company from audiences and critics. The scoreline reads: one bad, two kind, two favourable, one very good. Overall assessment? "They thought we were better than they thought we were going to be." And

even the negative criticism he found more helpful than the Australian equivalent. "Here, it's either smash hit or dismal failure — nothing in between and not much criticism to build on."

At the same time, the Company is also extending its activities into other areas within Australia. There's a TV film (co-produced by BBC and ABC), begun in Mildura and finished in Edinburgh, which goes to air in late winter in England, late autumn in Australia. It has an Australian producer (Brian Adams) and a British director (Colin Nears). As well, the ABC will be filming wife Annette's *Fabry Children* later this year — a slightly awkward project for the wardrobe, as all the children, refusing to stay at their previous size, need costumes a size up.

The touring and resident commitments of the Company are demanding: country tours of Tasmania, Victoria and SA, three seasons in Adelaide, three in Melbourne. And the repertoire is equally wide-ranging — one or

ten world premieres each year, around thirty works in the repertoire, new ballets by dancers in the Company. This last area is something Taylor clearly feels strongly about. The works can range from six-minute encores, works-in-progress, to twenty-minute fully-developed programmes. "I lay down no real set guidelines," says Taylor, "It's important to let the new choreographers find their own feet and make their own mistakes. And one hopes the audience will do the same. The views of dance in this country are not flexible enough — the audience often looks for a storyline when there is none. The choreographer is a bit like the playwright: the playwright has plenty of words but has to find out how best to put them together. Dance is more like poetry that plays with words, shifting them round, watching the images bounce off each other."

When one looks at the size of the ADT, it is sobering to realise how much it has achieved with comparatively small resources — an admini-



Joseph Scapellato and Alan Tavel in *Fibber McGee*. Photo: D & Zimmerman



Alan Tavel in *Widdlers* Photo: Bob Mahon

strative staff, for instance, of only five. Even more sobering are the economics of the operation. Here is a company which undertakes an exhausting programme each year, where the dancers are hardly ever away from the rehearsal and performance situation. And yet no dancer is on the average national weekly wage of \$240.00, the top ones get \$230.00. When one reflects that a moderate rugby league player could pick that up in an afternoon, a professional golfer win or lose it on one putt without turning a hair and a tennis player lose it down the drain with two broken racquets, one begins to see where priorities lie. BP are providing some sponsorship this year for the Company, maybe a few of those cigarette companies might like to slash some of their funds in the direction of a cultural and physical activity which is just as demanding as most sports?

Jonathan Taylor, *Adrian* Director of *Australian Dance Theatre* Photo: Bob Mahon

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Grants/Prizes

An award for a group of people or individuals in a specific theatre performance of an experimental or innovative nature.

Grants/Prizes

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TELEVISION 1981

Written and compiled by Michael Hohensee



Major deals for ABC

Big things are afoot for ABC-TV who look set to make some major co-production deals with American and British based interests shortly.

According to head of drama Geoff Daniels, who was tripping off to those countries early this year, the ABC is picking its way through all the offers inquired, he says, by the success of *Timeless Land* which was sold to Paramount last year.

He has hinted at a sizeable link-up worth millions of dollars over a number of years with a New York company but would say little else until negotiations had been completed. It's

planned that co-productions will make up about 50 per cent of the output of ABC-TV's Forest studios which the ABC recently acquired from Avon — it was originally a warehouse which the ABC transformed — after years of leasing. The all film production at Forest, just north of Sydney, supplies about 20 per cent of all ABC-TV drama.

They should have just finished *Sporting Chance*, a 10 one-hour series about an investigative sports journalist. He's played by Ray Barrett, and

his offider by Laddy Clark. It's scheduled to go to air in June.

Then Forest, with British interests, gets stuck into *Coral Island*, a children's series with location filming in Western Samoa. It should be completed by July next year and Forest producers then turn to *1911*, based on Roger MacDonagh's book of the same name which deals with two country boys who grow up together and go off to Gallipoli. It will be made as seven or eight one-hour series.

That should bring the film studios

Ray Barrett and Laddy Clark in ABC-TV's Sporting Chance



— now the biggest in Australia in continuous production, says Danich up to January 1982. What's produced from then on depends on some of these proposed co-production deals.

A co-production recently completed and which goes to air in March is seven one-hours in *Leskeri Men*. Based on the Hammond linear novel, it was shot in Greece with an Australian crew and stars Robert Colby, Marcus Goring and Takis Emmanuel.

A locally-made series, of which we had a taster over Christmas, is *Myson*, starring Ivar Kants as a parish priest who sees his role as a social one rather than pastoral. The 13-part show will be screened late in April.

The Melbourne arm of ABC-TV drama has already made about 80 per cent of the nine-part series based on the three books by Alan Marshall: *I Can Jump Puddles*, *This is the Grass* and *Now Beautiful are the Feet*. The series has been made as a contribution to the International Year of Disabled Persons. Melbourne are also into a number of children's series. They include *Parwork Hero*, *Marsh Fensh*, both six half-hours, and in the 1981-82 production year they're scheduled to make the series, *Cover Muborg*. *Moodan*, about a group of children who take over a deserted railway and some of the rolling stock. Melbourne is also looking at a 26 half-hours centred on the interests of a children's home.

Also planned for next year is a 90-minute telemovie, *The Lonsak Murders*, as well as a trilogy of 75-minute episodes, on the life of Australian composer Percy Grainger. Being prepared in Melbourne is a 10 one-hour series called *Degrees of Change*, which is based on a mother and daughter attending the same university. They've just completed the trilogy *Outbreak of Love*, with Rowen Wallace and Lawrence Held and in Sydney they've just finished another trilogy, *Loveless Strangers* with Carmen Duncan, Kit Taylor and Tony Bonner in the lead roles.

In Sydney ABC-TV is currently preparing as a four-parter the Louis Stone novel *Jonah*. Set at the turn of the century it's a study of a crippled boy who eventually runs his own shoe store. Also coming up for production

Why Auntie is avoiding Aus plays

ABC-TV won't be adapting any more Australian theatre plays for television for a while until they can find a suitable timeslot for them, preferably away from the ears of children.

The drama department ran into some trouble last year after screening some of the plays which brought protests from viewers about the bad language used. The plays, *Big Toys*, *Redfellow*, *The Department*, *Departmental*, *A Toast to Mabel* and *Coralle Landowne Says No*, were screened on a Sunday night and in some instances were adapted by the playwrights themselves.

Head of drama Geoff Danich said: "The problem with most Australian theatre plays, and it is peculiar to them, is that they all contain a sprinkling of bad language. It is almost a must with the Australian theatre writer to use extreme language." He said the ABC had not abandoned the

concept, but were holding out making more until they could see "what impact (programming) opportunities we have for using them".

Danich said: "Sunday nights at 7.00pm we always go with a family show, like *Creators Great and Small*, with mother and the kids sitting round. Then comes the theatre play at 8.30. We demarcated those plays tremendously before we even put them on, but we didn't take out enough because the public reacted bad language on a Sunday night. Had we been able to put them on at 9pm mid-week we would have been happier. They didn't sit properly at 8.30 on Sundays. But we can't put them on mid-week because we've got *Nationwide* at 9.30pm."

He said the ABC had bought three National Theatre plays from Granada TV in Britain — *Bedroom Farce* (Alan Ayckbourn), *For Services Rendered* (Somerset Maugham) and *The Double Dealer* (William Congreve)—and while "they're lusty, with sexual innuendo, they avoid bad language".

"The fact is," added Danich, "is that every (local) play we've looked at has had more bad language than is necessary."

is *Conferenceville*, an adaptation into three one-hours by Frank Moorhouse of his own book about a group attending a Canberra conference.

Also scheduled is a six one-hour series called *The Holton Woodshops*, based on the book by David Forrest which follows the adventures of a country boy who joins a Brisbane city bank. Just finished is *Wedding Tails*, one of a trilogy of plays to concentrate on Jewish humour. *Wedding Tails* by Ben Lewin and starring Barry Otto, tells of an Australian who returns home after working as an economist with the US government. He has some humorous run-ins with his family who want to marry him off to a good Jewish girl, but become outraged when he turns an affectionate eye in the direction of the Chinese baby-sitter.

The ABC, who want to continue to keep their hand in with the one off

play, are commissioning six scripts by Australian playwrights. The plays, all one-hours, are being made specifically to celebrate the ABC's 34th year in 1982. To date Louis Nowra and Thomas Keneally are in the preparation stage.

Also planned is a new series of *Spring and Fall* as a follow up to the six social dramas which were highly acclaimed last year. From ABC-TV's light entertainment department we should see another series of *First Be Marriage*, but that depends on the availability of Jackie Weaver who's currently in the stage production of *They're Playing Our Song* with John Waters.

There could also be a third series of *Home Sweet Home* (a second series was completed in December), one of ABC's highest rating shows which starred John Bluthal as the Italian-born Australian taxi driver



A Sweeney for the Streets of Sydney, Prisoner in trousers, and some comedy on Ten.

Up until about a month or so ago everyone it seemed — except executive producer Jack Blair — was naming likely candidates to play the lead in the \$13 million mini series *Sarah Jane* being made by co-producers South Australian Film Corporation for Network Ten.

Speculation was finally laid to rest when Blair chose Adelaide actress Nina Landis for the heroine in the adaptation of Catherine Gaskin's

novel about a correct woman who struggles for acceptance into Sydney society in the late 18th century.

But then, according to one report, Nina Landis pulled out, so presumably Blair had to do some quick thinking — and juggling. By the time you read this someone else should have slotted into the role, for production of the eight one-hour episodes should have got into full swing this month with screening planned for late this year or early in 1983. Ten must be crossing their fingers about the show's future for their last venture into the mini series area with *Water Under the Bridge* was without doubt a ratings disaster.

Ten have also committed themselves to two other costly series: *Parashment*, a no-holds-barred look at life in a men's prison, and *Belham*, yet another police series. Both shows, made by the Grundy Organisation, are 26 one-hour episodes.

Belham, we're told, could be paralleled to Britain's cop show *The Sweeney* and America's *Nurses of San Francisco*. And if it is anywhere near as successful as those two, no one should be complaining, least of all Ten.

Writer Ron McLean was talking about his *Belham* concept almost three years ago and late last year a two-hour telemovie cum pilot was made. Production of the first episodes, with John Stanton as Bellamy and Tim

Elton as his offsider, Senior Detective Mitchell, began in December last.

The series will be shot on film on locations in and around Sydney. Executive producer Don Bellie says it's "tough and tough, and crammed with action and adventure".

Adam Garnett plays a 17-year-old newsboy befriended by Bellamy, and Sally Conners plays his girlfriend. James Condon is Inspector Daley, chief of the special crime squad for whom Bellamy and Mitchell work.

In the telemovie other parts are played by John Hamilton, Brian Young, Sean Scully, Martin Harris and many, many more.

Hyatt's beginning to think that this is just another Australian cop show, but from Sydney this time. John Stanton has been quoted as saying "we're humanising the police far more than we did ten years ago." Grundy's did try the "humanising" treatment about four years ago with *King's Men*, but that died very quickly on the streets of King's Cross.

This year we're going to get another serve of life behind bars. However, Ten's *Prisoner* series, made by Grundy's in Melbourne and on air for two years now, is almost certain to outlive their newest prison drama *Parashment* made in Sydney and due for screening this month.

We'll have no more *Parashment* after the 26 episodes which are set in fictitious Longridge Gaol, mocked up in Ten's Sydney studios with outside filming at East Sydney Technical College and Gladesville Psychiatric Hospital.

Singer/comedian Barry Crooker is the governor of Longridge, "an academic bent on reform rather than parashment." Apparently his methods are resented by the old guard officers, especially chief warden Jack Hudson played by Ken Wayne.

Other officers are played by Ralph Cottrell, Brian Wenzel and Ross Thompson. Playing those behind the bars are Jon Ewing, Michael Smith, Mike Preston and Brian Harrison. Female roles are played by Julie McGregor, Anne Haddy, Corinna Franco, Peare Hackforth-Jones and Kim McQuade.

The word is that the networks, over the past six months or so, have been inundated with ideas for satirical shows. And this month John Eastway

John Stanton as Bellamy in Ten's new police series, *Belham*.



(of the *Gunston* shows) moves into Ten's Sydney studios to make a pilot *Savage*. Executive producer is filmmaker Hal McElroy and the writers include Geoff Atkinson, Morris Gleitzman and Trevor Farrant. Featuring Robyn Moore and John Derrum it will be a topical comedy show and if accepted by the network will screen weekly.

In Melbourne Ten have made another series (eight half-hours) of *Are You Being Served?* starring Britain's John Inman and our own Jane Brummell. The first series rated well in



Aaron Watson and Paul Long are some from *The Young Doctors* series.

Melbourne, but was up against a (20 Minutes) in Sydney.

This is the third year of *The Armistis Fears* with many of the old regulars, including Nick Redburn and Jane Sabor, long departed John Dwart and Jan Kingsbury have taken on long-running roles and as I write Ten were considering, in Sydney at least, running the show nightly as half-hour episodes. The aim would be to try and knock some points off Tony Barber and his *Sale of the Century*, last year's ratings success which hit *Willoughby at Seven* for six.



World War II ends on Nine! — amidst a sea of soap

The Eastern States Nine network haven't been exactly innovative in recent years with their contribution to local drama. They've relied almost exclusively on their two soap operas, *The Sullivans* and *The Young Doctors*, to carry the flag.

And if we point the finger at Nine for their lack of inspiration, they'll quickly point out that last year was tops as far as they're concerned and as a network they make an across the board commitment to all areas of television (well, who doesn't?) including sport, variety, comedy and chat shows, backed up, of course, by production of the two staples which were both first screened within a week of one another in 1976.

A few years back Nine did dabble in a series of six telemovies in a co-production venture with Film Australia, and although they captured a

number of television awards for their excellence and some kudos for the network, they haven't seen fit to launch into anything else adventurous.

However, they do have up their sleeves two children's adventure dramas, *Falcon Island* and *Secret Paths*. Sad to say that they both appear to be in the goodies v baddies category, without too much substance involved.

Falcon Island is a series of 13 by 30 minutes. It was written by Joan Ambrose and made by the Perth Institute of Film and TV with backing from the Nine network, the Australian

Film Commission and Channel Nine Perth. It's about three children — two 12-year-old boys and an eight-year-old girl — who become involved in a search for an old Dutch wreck off the WA coastline. This is all set against a controversial sand-mining venture and a plan to smuggle gold.

Alan Cassell plays the lead baddie and Peter Maxwell directed the series filmed, in the main, in and around Rottnest Island. Nine are claiming it's the most expensive children's drama ever shot for television, but they won't say how much it has all cost. With so many production companies keeping

Brian Davies and Graham Kerr, joint *The Young Doctors* in 1981.





Paul Hogan as Dave in *Now! The Sullivans*

quest about production costs it would seem to be a funds claim.

Secret Valley has had a chequered existence. Produced by Roger Mirams (of *Last Island* fame) of the Grundy Organisation for the Nine network it took on a new title, *The Ghost Town Gang*, until a bush fire swept through the set located at the Smoky Dawson Ranch north of Sydney. Reverting to its original title, the two hours in the can have been broken down to four half-hour episodes and it appears

destined to become a much longer series.

Basically *Secret Valley* centres on a group of kids who set out to save old man's property from grasping land developers. There's a long list of child actors in the show, including Mark Spain, Michael McGilchrist and Kelly Dingwall. Adult actors include Max Cullen, John Hamblin, Hugh Keays Byrne and Peter Gwynt.

Probably the most significant thing

about to happen in *The Sullivans* in 1981 is that the end of World War Two is nigh. During the latter half of the year the family and their contemporaries will have to adjust to peacetime.

Although the war-time element, on which the show was initially based, will be removed, the show will continue to revolve round the family. Dave Sullivan (played by Paul Hogan) now a widower, will be back on every street. He'll be embroiled in a new romance and the Sullivan's first grandchild will be introduced.

The Young Doctors goes into its fifth year, too. More outside broadcasting is planned for the series set in the Albert Memorial Hospital. It continues to be staffed by the good-looking set and still retains its popularity round the country, mainly with children, I suspect.

Paul Hogan's marvellable style will undoubtedly bring in top ratings points for Nine again this year. Hogan, who has no contract with the network ("just a handshake"), is very much a law unto himself: he only made three specials last year and at this stage Nine have no idea what's planned for 1981. Hogan maintains "I'm just basically lazy".



The seven network must be a little apprehensive about the reception on air of their latest drama *A Town Like Alice*, probably in May.

That's not to say the six-hour television version of the Nevil Shute novel is not worthy of praise, more that the viewing public appears to have lost some of its enthusiasm for mini-series.

Seven, of course, inspired their opposition into the area of mini-series when they achieved tremendous ratings with *Against the Wind*. However, their follow-up, *The Last Outlaw*, screened last year, did not rate anywhere near so well. And only late last year the Ten network barred their fingers with *Water Under the Bridge*, a well-produced series, but one which failed miserably on the airwaves. The film version of *Alice*, made in 1936 and which starred Peter Finch and Virginia McKenna, only took in a part

of the novel — the wartime period in Malaya. In Seven's version they're not sure at this point how it will be broken down into episodes — producer Henry Crawford and director David Stevens also include the out-back story after the war ends.

Major investors are Seven, with the Australian Film Commission, the Victorian Film Commission and the BBC also contributing. Much talent was brought together for the series which cost about \$1.35 million with location shooting in Malaya, Sydney and Broken Hill.

The series has a collection of fine actors and actresses with Helen Morse as Jean Paget and Bryan Brown as Joe Humeau. They're supported by Britain's Gordon Jackson (of *Upstairs, Downstairs*), Dorothy Allison, veteran American actor Yaku Shimoda, New Zealand's Pat Evison, Maggie Dence, Anna Voloka, Maure Fields, Peter Collingwood and a host of others.

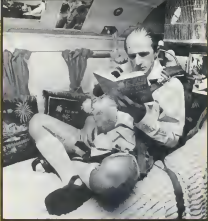
***A Town Like Alice* is Seven's dramatic flagship—but will it get the ratings?**

For those under 40 who don't know the story, Jean Paget, a young English girl who lives in Malaya, is taken prisoner by the Japanese shortly before the fall of Singapore. After trekking round Malaya with a group of captives, many of whom die off along the way, she strikes up a friendship with Australian Joe Harmon who steals food for the wandering prisoners. He is eventually captured, too, and crucified. After the war Jean discovers Joe didn't die and comes to Australia in search of him. Meanwhile he's gone to England to find her. They eventually meet up in Cairns, but find it difficult to bridge the gap of many years separation.

During the making of *Aftercast* and crew were airlifted to the island of Langkawi off north-east Malaya for the wartime sequences, and despite tropical illnesses, strange food and leeches, production stayed on schedule for the five week's shoot.

Even if all this effort to produce a creditable, worthwhile series does not pay off in local terms, it's almost assured of a number of overseas sales.

While production of their soap operas, *Cop Shop* and *Sixways*, continue in Melbourne, in Sydney Seven, more than any other network, persevering with situation comedies. Last year they hit the jackpot with *Kingwood Country*, written and produced by Gary Reilly and Tony Sattler, the duo who make up RS Productions. RS, of course, started on



Norman Gammon in his specially equipped DC-3 in Seven's Gammon's Australia

the road to television comedy with *The Naked Four Show*.

In popularity terms, *Kingwood* is probably the most successful situation comedy since the McGooley era, which starred Gordon Chase and John Meillon. As you read this *Kingwood* should be into production of its third series with Ross Higgins as the Ingot Bullpitt and Judi Farr as his suffering wife Thel.

Last year RS made four comedy pilots and one of them, *Dash at Dawn*, was picked up by Seven. Made as 13 half-hour episodes it will start on air about the second week in February. Seven must have been impressed for they've already commissioned a second series which is scheduled to go into production some time in May.

The series is set in a Sydney newspaper office and stars Henri Seggs as the news editor, Noeline Brown, an A-grade formerly married to the news editor, Terry Wader, the homosexual showbiz and social writer, Robert Hughes, journalist and strong union man, and Julianne Newbould, a liberated woman reporter.

They all work for *The Sun* newspaper and writers Reilly and Sattler say that any resemblance in the show

"to journalists living, dead, half dead, or just plain sober, is entirely coincidental".

With production of *Kingwood* and *Dash*, Seven will be screening 39 half-hour episodes of RS comedy during 1981. And there could be more, in production at least. Two pilots, *Twelve Below*, set in an Australian Antarctic base and starring Noel Ferrier, and *Cop Show*, with Les Marmion and Henry Searp, could also get the go ahead.

Seven's programming won't be short of comedy this year, that's assuming they'll screen Gammon's *Australia* which they've had ready to roll, after much post production work, for more than six months now.

Story is that the top dogs at Seven weren't mad keen on the eight half-hours initially, but have since done an about turn and have become enthusiastic.

In Gammon's *Australia* Garry McDonald as Norman takes off in his own, hilariously appointed DC-3 and flies to remote spots round Australia. His aim is to discover his roots in a fashion the Leyland brothers and Harry Butler have never managed to achieve.



Henri Seggs and Noeline Brown in Seven's *Dash at Dawn*

FILM



BY ALFARANTH
REDFIELD

Up-There-Cazaly Action

The Club is a big vigorous, funny, noisy, wise film entertaining on its two levels of boardroom politics and playing-field action photographed to the dramatic utmost. It happens to be about a club in the Victorian Football League but the approach of the director, Bruce Beresford, could equally well be applied to behind-the-scenes and up-front activities in any company, organised charity or anti-administrative committee. This is the way people operate: lying, manipulating, adapting, pushing a line, occasionally moved by sympathy or even boredom into going way to the right, occasionally letting good come out of evil.

Beresford, who following *Breaker Morant* and this film (not to mention *The Gearing of Windows* and *Don's Party*, and overlooking *The Money Men*) may be seen as Australia's leading director — Fred Schepisi having measured himself from the scene, if only temporarily — has pulled *The Club* off the stage where it began and into the open by two means: a few changes in emphasis from the original and the truly inspired camera of Don McAlpine. *The Club* on stage was all talk — you are not

going to get a VFL grand final into a theatre — and this way the cinema version is also all talk, but it is photographed talk. McAlpine has gone to most ingenious lengths to keep everything lively, and some of it is exciting and actually beautiful.

The chief people in *The Club* are Laurie the coach, Garry the manager, Ted the president, Jack the co-president, former coach and former player, Danny the captain, and the expensive new player worth \$420,000, played respectively by Jack Thompson, Alan Cassell, Graham Kennedy, Frank Wilson, Harold Hopkins and John Howard. The Collingwood Football Club supplied itself in club-rooms and many of its supporters. Without Collingwood the producers, Matt Carroll says, there would have been no film and I can believe it. The South Australian Film Corporation and the NSW state supplied the money and Roadshow is distributing. They should all be very happy about the product.

Williamson and Beresford have a lot in common, that is, they are interested in people existing to each other, and that is what *The Club* is about. The coach has now won a grand final, the president is financially embarrassed and trying to pull a success out of it, but the co-president is consumed with vanity, the manager plays both sides against the middle, the captain on his last season, the new player is confused, lacks confidence, and sits on his money, talking. The performers are all amazingly good: Thompson again prisoners for his enormous talent that touches refinement, of uncertainty that he has used to achieve the hard gloss on many of his roles. Kennedy proves again that contrary to his television history he is a master of the subtle play, Cassell is marvelously made as the manager.

These characters, and Danny, are developed in the songs and dances. I am less certain of John Howard's new player. Nor is Frank Wilson's tendency to nag entirely under control. The two or three women who briefly appear do not make much impact, nor are they required to. *Breaker Morant* was about their business, and so is *The Club*.

Assessing that the enormous number of people held captive every winter weekend by Australian Rules will also want to see the extraordinary game — how about those dirty little shorts and snap-top trousers? — on screen, *The Club* should not lack audiences. They will have to say alert to follow the politics, but presumably the Up-There-Cazaly action (and song) will be worth the strain.

Fatty Finn

Some deductions may be made of the attitude film makers bring to children's films from the fact that the last one issued to the press on the occasion of the *Fatty Finn* preview featured 22 adults and not one child, although the film is full of children, some of them quite talented. Other documents issued at the time revealed the name of the young star: Ben Gurnebould. The production notes mention the name of one other child actor in passing, but that's it. The rest of the material is concerned, at length, with the advertisements on the art of such television "celebration" as Bert Newton, Lorraine Bayly, Brian Blair, Josh Farr, Gerard Kennedy etc. whose faces come and go on a flash.

The *Fatty Finn* film is very farcical, and is derived not from the natural hazards of children's life but from a series of elaborately constructed scenes, such as frog races and goat races and Fatty's efforts to obtain a crystal set so that he can hear Don Bradman play cricket against England. There is some hyped-up "gang" warfare of a sort (as) as the whole plot and the incidents that finally bring Fatty out on top are not very funny. Ben Gurnebould does remarkably well with stodgy material. The film taken from material used by the late Syd Nelbells in his long-running comic strip of the same name, was directed by Maurice Murphy on location in Gt. B. and financed by the Children's Film Corporation.



Harold Hopkins and Graham Kennedy
in *The Club*

NEW MUSIC THEATRE SCRIPTS/ CONCEPTS

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INTERNATIONAL

Charmed Circle

by Karl Lavett

The Circle Repertory Company is one of the strongest of the theatre companies that give variety and depth to New York theatre. It is a non-profit institutional company and one of the few groups in the English-speaking world where playwrights-in-residence create for specific actors.

This nurturing of playwrights is bringing a happy harvest to the Circle Repertory. Already the Circle has produced works by David Mamet, Robert Patrick, Sam Shepard, Milan Kundera and Albert Camus. The Circle provides a venue for the working through of new plays with a continuing project-in-progress series for new and established playwrights. But probably just as importantly it allows them a place to fail — and to fail with some grace.

Two recent products from the Circle Repertory illustrate the process and benefits of this policy of nourishment. In the Circle's small Off-Broadway house at Sheridan Square was *The Driveners* by a 24-year-old playwright, Jon Leonard Jr. On Broadway, Lanford Wilson's *The Fifth of July* stars Christopher Reeve (of Superman fame) in the central role. It began at the Circle two years ago and here arrives on the Great White Way trimmed and lightened. Mr. Leonard Jr. is a freshman in the Circle's School of Encouragement; Mr. Wilson stands as a triumphant graduate, laurel-crowned.

The Driveners is Jon Leonard Jr.'s first professional production. With this play he won the 1980 American College Theatre Festival New Playwriting Contest. Last season it was a Circle Repertory Project-in-Progress. Mr. Leonard Jr. hails from Indiana and *The Driveners* is set in a small Indiana town in the 1930's. The tale's double meaning refers to a retarded boy's gift for driving water and a lapsed preacher who comes to the town.

It is very much a young man's play. The central theme is manipulated and predictable, rustic symbolism runs rife but along the way Mr. Leonard Jr. demonstrates a deft for country dialogue and a feel for genuine characterization. The result is an effective theatre piece where you forgive the play's ambitions but flawed thrust to survive the interesting things that happen along the way. The Circle's



Christopher Reeve, Susan Kurr and Ann Wright in *The Fifth of July*. Photo: Martha Joyce



Leanne Hughes, Irvn Sandler and John Givens in *The Driveners*. Photo: Gert Gosholtz

production is cohesive and convincing, helped greatly by John Lee Barry's bluish-on-a-bare setting. Let's hope Mr. Leonard Jr. shows his gratitude for all this kindly treatment with some worthy efforts in future years.

Lanford Wilson is a founding member of the Circle Repertory and now among its most valuable assets. Over the years he has provided the Circle with a string of plays, including *The Sisters of Eldritch* and *The Hot I, Baltimore*. Last season the Circle Repertory's production of his *Fifth of July* came to Broadway and captured the Pulitzer Prize. The success of *Fifth of July* has given the impetus to present *The Fifth of July*, which actually was written before *Fifth of July*, and presented at the Circle in 1978. The two plays are part of a trilogy concerning the Talley family in Lebanon, Missouri. The remaining play *The War in Lebanon* will be presented as

part of the Circle's expertise this season.

When *Fifth of July* is a small, strong two-character piece, in *The Fifth of July* Mr. Wilson has been much more ambitious. Not only has he created a Chalkoan-type ensemble of characters, but also he is pursuing the big themes of survival and renewal in a contemporary American setting.

On a wide, white-washed veranda that Mark Twain would have loved we meet Wilson's set of survivors. Ken Talley, who has lost both legs in Vietnam and is home to make a new life as a teacher in Lebanon, Jed, his lover, Aunt Sally, whom we meet as the young girl in *Fifth of July*, now carrying her late husband's ashes around in a chocolate box, two of Ken's former Berkeley confederates Gwen, a dizzy copper heiress and John, her cool and calculating husband, Wes, a musician who is to help Gwen become a rock star, June, Ken's sister and a former radical, and Stanley, June's 13-year-old daughter and "the last of the Talleys".

Wilson's delineation of character through sharp, often funny, dialogue, plus well-placed monologues shows a writer at the top of his craft. It is also an actor's play where each is given a splendid opportunity to take the ball and run. It is disappointing then that such an attractive and well-balanced play is cluttered with sub-plot and sudden asides to rob it of some of its impact. The serious themes developed in the play call for something more open-ended; ambiguity and paradox are used throughout the play and should be more evident at its closing.

Also the Broadway presentation lacks cohesion. Marshall W. Mason, the director (he's also the Director of the Circle Repertory and its driving force), has been unable to gain the ensemble balance and pacing to make a satisfying turn of the parts. A couple of the performances are first class — Joyce Rocking's June and Jeff Daniel's Jed. For Susan Kurr as Gwen nothing succeeds like excess and while she gets every laugh and supplies much of the play's energy, she almost sweeps the balance of Mr. Wilson's craft. Christopher Reeve as Ken should provide the weighty centre of the play, but while he is certainly adequate, he lacks the physical and vocal presence that might have kept the play on a more even keel.

The awkward aim of the Circle Repertory in the "discovery of lyric realism as the native voice of American Theatre" and *The Fifth of July* is as good an example of "lyric realism" as the Circle has given us. While admiring the Circle's single-minded vision,



James Earl Jones, Marie Perle and Robert Finkelstein in Fugard's *A Lesson From Africa*.

the concept of "live realism" does leave some nagging doubts it is not the preservation of a past form? could it not become its own straightjacket?

The Circle has recently announced an exchange programme with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Readings of plays by Circle playwrights including Lancelotti Wilson have taken place at the Abbey. With the careful nurturing the Circle Repertory is providing American playwrights it may some day bequeath a theatrical legacy to rival that of its Irish colleague.

The Facts of Life

The premiere of *The Fifth of July* on Broadway is an encouraging sign, for while "serious drama" exists in many forms Off-Broadway, in the glare of Broadway's bright lights examples of the species can usually be counted on one hand — or less. These recent offerings indicate the nature of the struggle.

Arthur Miller's new play *The American Clock* has already given up the ghost, slABBED to death by the *New York Times* critic, Frank Rich. Mr Rich's principal complaint was that the Broadway presentation of the play was not up to an earlier version seen at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina. This may be true, but from the evidence on Broadway, it would seem that either version would be of interest to theatregoers. This is Miller back on firm autobiographical ground: the devastating effect of the Depression on his family. Miller's audience is to encompass the Depression in *now*, but when the family goes out of focus, the play becomes diffuse, heavy-lidded and sentimental. Still the play offers some powerful scenes and it is hoped that *The American Clock* will

disappear somewhere for bunkering and re-construction.

Hugh Leonard had a considerable success on Broadway two seasons ago with *Do In A Life*. He has taken a character from the previous play, the acid-tongued civil servant Drummer, and shows us Drummer reviewing his life upon learning he has a terminal illness. Like *Do In A Life* it uses a flashback technique, young students for the memory sequences, and a graceful flow of Irish wit to keep the play's machinery well oiled. Roy Dotrice as Drummer wonderfully catches the coldness and the disappointment of the man, while still revealing a deliciously ironic wit. This is a small, neat play about a life that was small and much too neat by half.

Neatness does not apply to Athol Fugard's *A Lesson From Africa*, without ever mentioning the image the play evokes a hard-core and never-ending pain. Mr Fugard is back in his misbegotten South Africa giving his starkest picture to date. This time there are only three characters: a middle-aged Afrikaner, his wife recently from a mental home and their friend, a black political leader just released from jail and ready to flee to England. Slowly with gentleness and dignity, Fugard strips the layers from all three to show the essence of each victim. Fugard achieves this by some remarkable writing, with never a hint of the melodramatic and conveying quietly a long gut-wrenching cry of despair. As the Afrikaner, Harris Yulin gives a superb performance and shows he is one very able American actor who is continually widening his depth and range. As director as well as playwright, Athol Fugard knows exactly what he is doing.

Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* has joined the

struggling band. It has Ian McKellen in the Schofield role, with Tim Curry and Jane Seymour as Mr and Mrs Wolfgang M. Perhaps with the best Broadway audiences will no longer be able to totally avoid the facts of life.

Old actors never die

By Irving Wardle

In this season of out-price holidays in run-banked resorts and stock-unloading stampedes along the high street, it is usual for theatre critics to curl up by the fireplace and compile balance sheets on the past year's trade. I confess I have not the heart for this job. For me, 1980 was overwhelmingly a year of death.

Among young and old alike, more exceptional talents have vanished than in any previous year I can remember. David Hirst, Ken Tynan, Norman Marshall, Richard Beckinsale, Robert Rigg (who directed *Middle Age Spread* during his last illness), Ben Travençolo (in the last days before his death in mid-December) — this is only the beginning of a list which has left behind more hate-served eulogies than the Arts Council's latest savage round of theatrical cuts.

Amazingly but as always, the great



Attila the Hun in the National Theatre's *Early Days*. Photo: John Haines

actors have been spared. Our old actresses die, but the names of our leading actors have remained unchanged since the 1940's: Gielgud, Olivier, Redgrave, Spalding, are all still around and more or less still in work. Not to mention Ralph Richardson, whom, if we followed the C.19th custom,

world long ago have been designated a living artistic treasure. To its lasting credit, the National Theatre has taken pains to cherish Richardson as if he were a Strindberg, and never more so than in the production of David Storey's *Death Days* which has finally transferred to the West End before moving to Toronto and Washington. With no disrespect to Storey, this haunting little piece demands attention above all for the opportunities it gives to an leading actor in its muted 100 minutes, we meet an old politician living out his retirement with his elderly despairing daughter and her stone-faced company director husband. Played by anyone but the character of Sir Richard Ruckles, known to the world as Britain's longest serving Minister for Health, might seem no more than a hole in the ear. What did he say in the interview that wrecked his career? How did he destroy the wife for whom he now claims undying love? Why could he with a political career at all ages his view is that nothing worth mentioning happens after the age of 21?

Such questions rebound meaningfully from Richardson's performance. As in

Storey's *Flower*, the text offers the actor a neat abstract outline to flood with colour. There are jokes and other literary gestures in the dialogue but it is at its most telling when it simply allows him to say "No thank you" in two contrasted tones of voice, or reply "It is" when someone says the sun is setting.

What the text does contain is a series of hints precisely related to Richardson's temperamental range. These include the sense of standing obliquely to the surrounding world and coming into it with inconsequential crosses or flashes of desolate poetry, and the light inconceivability of health and strength from a state that looks hopelessly gaunt.

One fascination of the part as he develops it is that in spite of his declared indifference to the life around him (Lindsay Anderson's drum-like production is presented as if seen through the old man's eyes), he consciously cross-examines everyone who crosses his path, and then converts whatever he has learned into fresh fables in delivery, in movement - the deliberate military stance, the lean, steadily mobile arms -

everything in the performance expresses a prayer for escape. His stage authority is total.

Amid a scientific tide of reviews (Proulx, Pinter, Arthur Miller, Pinter) two novelists claim brilliant attention: Walter Brown and David Hughes's *The Biography Girl* (Phoenix) a modern British musical tribute to the silent movies torn apart by its composing royalties to Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish, and DW Griffith, and *Blackstones* (Lyons, Hammerstein) a genre piece on the Labour Party's annual Blackpool conference by the Guardian's political columnist Peter Jenkins, whose choice of the Edwardian well-made play structure conveys the traditional impression that despite all the talk of social collapse everything is still as safe as houses. Robert David MacDonald's *Don Juan* (Royal Homet) which formed the occasion for the highly esteemed Glasgow Citizen's Theatre's first London appearance, proved such a dose of self-innocent sub-Aeschylus verbal posturing that - even in the general dearth of interesting new material - one would gladly have ended it for a Melian review.

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THE ACTORS' CENTRE, 100 Wandoo Street, LONDON. A pilot scheme conducted last spring with a variety of classes and other activities proved a great success, and resulted in the permanent centre being established. It provides an educational and social centre for thousands of actors based in London and those who visit the capital from the regions and abroad.

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL THEATRE ALLIANCE will offer two playwrighting awards for women playwrights. **THE APHRA BEHN AWARD.** For one full length play by a woman playwright. **THE MARGARET MAYO-ROA AWARD.** - For two related short plays by one woman playwright. Winners will receive public readings of their winning plays during WITA's Festival 1981, home days consisting of their formal attendance, women introduction to play publishers, and conferees desiring their awards.

THIRD WORLD THEATRE FESTIVAL AND COLLOQUIE. The Korean Centre for the ITI is organising this International Festival in Seoul. It aims to examine the present conditions of Third World Theatre and attempt to indicate its future course developments under the influence of the institutions of world theatre. 20-30 March 1981.

30th INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF THEATRE CRITICS. The Yugoslav

ITI Centre and the Association of Theatre Critics are in the process of planning this symposium to be held in Novi Sad in May 1982, during the 26th Yugoslav theatre festival.

The symposium will last for three days and the theme will be "The Theatrical Production and the Language of Criticism".

The organising body, **STERJINO POZORJE**, will pay accommodation costs at Novi Sad for all participants who deliver papers. An outline of the proposed paper, which should not last longer than 10 minutes (3 typed pages should be sent to Mr Doran Sokolov, Director, Mr Katarina Koci-Petrovic, Secretary, **STERJINO POZORJE**, Zmaj Jovina 23/1, 21000 Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. Further particulars from Australian Centre ITI. Outlines wanted by the end of March 1981).

TRAINING OF THEATRE CRITICS

There are plans to organise an ITI seminar on the training of theatre critics in Toronto, Canada, April 1981. The American National Playwrights Conference includes a 4-week professional workshop for theatre critics and for journalists with an interest in the performing arts. August, 1981.

NINETEENTH BIENNIAL ITI CONGRESS. Organized by the Spanish Centre, Madrid, 30 May - 6 June 1981. Prospective Australian delegates please apply to ITI Sydney.

DANCE



BY WILLIAM SHATNER

Anna Karenina and Cinderella

The last time I saw Valentina Kozlova was with the Bolshoi in Levrovsky's secular realist fairy tale, *The Snow Flower*. Appearing as the Masters of the Copper Mountain, she had to perform, seriously, as a piece of dancing machinery. If you could imagine a sort of glam Josephine Baker, that is what she came across as, bouncing and back-bending amidst a haze of clunky corps de ballet carapaces. I don't know what it was supposed to prepare me for, but it didn't prepare me for seeing her in *Anna Karenina*. It didn't prepare her, come to that.

Kozlova, fresh from delivering, dancing in the Australian Ballet's *Anna Karenina*, suffers from the difficulties that any performer used to one style has to suffer when transplanted into another. Seeing Kozlova dance *Anna* is to see someone trying to stretch their abilities without taking that attempt to its fullest extent. She dances *Anna* as if she were Maya Plisetskaya dancing it with the Bolshoi. She brings all those crackle manœuvres and palpitating baroqueisms to it, and, picking up one after the other, uses them as levers, not really caring whether the fabric of the genre role chosen can hold and bleed with the whole. She obviously thinks that *Anna* is the be all and end all of *Anna Karenina*.

It could be unforgivable with the material, but I think not. The trouble is she tries to meet the part with more glances, heartache and choreographic grandeur than it can hold and as a result she remains apart — tantalizing, interesting and sometimes exciting, but never believable.

The outcome of all this is probably to be found in the penultimate scene of the elite ballet, set in the foyer of the Marinsky. It is here, if you remember, that *Anna* feels that Vronsky has spurned her and society has cast her out.

Now when Marilyn Rowe did this part, although there are dozens of faults in her dancer style, one could believe that something had snapped inside: the hysteria was entirely natural because it wasn't danced purely, and was all the more harrowing for that. Nervous and restless, of placement went out, phrasing was interrupted, the woman was a butterfly caught in the belljar of emotion and social disgrace and she was becoming quickly exhausted. None of that happened with Kozlova, nothing snapped. The paroxysm of movements remained studied and schooled, and, therefore, it all looked dead and rather absurdly because here you were seeing the choreography as its threadbare self and nothing could be perceived beyond it.

Apart from that, *Anna Karenina* remains the dead duck it was last year, with the corps as lame as ever and the music as flat as slowly and violently as they wrote their. Prokofiev has made some small changes here and there (including extra appearances by the principals in the sequestered second act) but these remain in the manner of some minor carpentry in a badly constructed house. With its extravagant drapage and multitudinous sets, *Anna* has a certain plume and weight, but the ballet is not lost.

Last year's revival of Frederick Ashton's *Cinderella* by the Australian Ballet was a welcome event not so much because the work was worth reviving, but because it gave a chance for an analysis of various members of the Company, their varying strengths and abilities and, by extension, a consideration of the health of the AB as a whole.

Although I feel that Ashton's *Cinderella* is probably the best of the current versions, I don't consider it one of his best works. It was created in 1948 and while it did in effect strengthen the position of the then Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet and did bring recognition to Ashton, it remains an early and patchy work. There are moments in the ballet (I'm thinking particularly of the Act 1 scene 2 divertissement of the Fairies) where the choreography is downright sexy and correct. No one can ever make sufficient design sense of the score for the "star-farmer" and the female corps de ballet that time around, made them look like a bundle of waitresses.

But the difficulties go further than that. There seems to be a curious lack of backbone in Ashton's version. It is a search for wonderment and magic without any moral point and this relegates it to the

realm of an extended divertissement.

One gave up trying to enjoy the ballet as a story, letting it go its own silly way and settled back to watch the dancers battling with the choreography and their technique.

The first night cast of Lois Strike (Cinderella) and Gery Norman (Prince) flattered its way from happy melodrama to sugar promises in the Ballroom scene and sly banish in the final love scene. The top part de down in Act 2 took an com to get finished and was a chastening lesson in cold detachment and absence of rage. Neither of them were in top form. Norman had a couple of nasty slips on his first entrance, and though not seriously his faults they made him even more pathetically and clunkily theatrical. Lois Strike will never be a satisfactory image of a hard-done-by, suppose living in a fantasy, it is not her style and it shows. She never 'gave' anything extra in her dancing of the part, every movement had a palpable beginning and an emphatic finish which robbed it of any flow.

The cast of Shetler Raymond, Dale Baker was more coherent, but still lacking in any humanity although it was graced by a lovely sense of wonderment in the central pas de deux, lifting and soaring, it was the core of brightness around which a lot of their other dancing swung fell off into shadow. Raymond was convincing in the little dash of the first scene in the ballet but this promising ballerina whose foot is skilled in grace then always leads with her jaw has got to get rid of an ugly stiffness in her arms and back.

Lyette Mann and Paul de Maeson worked very hard at what they were doing, but frankly I think both of them were badly cast, romantic leads are not really their style either. Both of them are good allegro dancers, sharp, secure and responsive to the music, but slow their dance and expect them to give satisfaction to a sugar romantic circumstances and they look apologetic and affected. Mann especially is a great character dancer and one who is (or can be) the best in the Company when it comes to comedy roles. Her technique gets purer and more serious with every performance she gives, but selection for her roles must be made carefully, put her in the wrong one and she (or he for that matter) will surely look diffident and lost.

Michaela Karabiner along with the above Marilyn Rowe is the only Company dancer with the technique and stage presence (not to mention the looks) capable of carrying the major dramatic ballerina roles (Giselle, Odette and



From 'Anastasia' with Joanne Mitchell (R) & Condorelle. Photo: Stuart Gorton

Aurora). For steady execution, flow and characterisation, her partnering with the ever reliable Nelson Cox was the best of all the outings. Wonderment, pathos, humour and suspense were all expertly blended in their interpretation and it made the ballet with all its faults live.

Nelson Cox has been such a familiar face over the years that not only does he give gifts for granted. He is one of the last of the 'old' school of male dancers (by which I mean the Michael Somers, John Gapes school), correct placement, clean execution and a fully matched line in solo and a rock steady arm in partnering has made him the greatest choreographic asset the AB has.

Joanne Mitchell on the other hand, is one of the up and coming ballerinas in the Company. Throughout *Condorelle's* run she played the Fairy Godmother, not a role that needs great acting gifts but one that demands a strong technique. She still retains a pure manner of ever advancing security but her bodily image has nothing as yet personal stamped upon it. There is a strict classroom look about it that will need more performances to shape into a statement of style.

Space prohibits any extended comment on the four roles in the frames of the Four Seasons development in *Condorelle Act 1*, except to say that all of them worked really to get across individual character in

each scene while blurring the choreography that on its own can be sufficient to communicate.

Taken by and large, with the faults of *Condorelle's* choreography taken into account and the empty spaces of the story ever before one's eyes, the Company is strong in spite a few fields, but the strengths are spread rather thickly and the AB should take more trouble with its revival and strong the ragging parts of them. It should also work on individual weaknesses within its Company as well as capitalising on its strengths — not to passing out and homogenise everything they do but to give each more poise and daring in whatever it decides to tackle.

ideas. But I've got some ideas and I think I can listen well." Such honesty has always proved for him the best policy. "If you manufacture answers because you're afraid of admitting to not having an answer, you're in real trouble."

His concern to share will make the idea of associate directors a pressing one — having learnt from Nimrod not to attempt to direct more than four shows a year himself. "If I was going to SA, thinking that I was going to be planning the season wholly by myself and the running of the company rested purely on my ability I'd never go there."

As things stand he will be joining two stalwarts of the company he is leaving — Paul Iles the GM and Graeme Murray, the production manager. Though all will build on "an experience that was pretty wonderful, of a company whose arrogance and showmanship in the best sense, allows it to be a very welcoming place for the public." But he is not going to make the mistake of enjoying the Nimrod style on the STC.

He wants a character of his own to

emerge and believes in a significant "cultural coming together" with himself, the STC people, and with Jim Sharman and then Elijah Moshinsky being on hand for the next two festivals.

One of the possibilities he sees is that a group of actors is more likely to remain together in Adelaide than in Melbourne or Sydney where many theatres, television and film companies are vying for their services, "and I believe that the quality of work will be such that almost any actor would be happy to work there over a period of time."

It is possible too that with support Armfield could be the one to turn the cultural axis of Melbourne and Sydney into a triangle: he wants a decent exchange system so that "the productions that we might not want to do in SA ourselves, but which an audience may want to see, can come from the Melbourne and Sydney Theatre Companies, and so that we can take our work there."

He speaks of an open, honest company — one which will as a policy encourage people to involve them-

selves in its work, especially young directors and playwrights. Open, he says, but without that sense of unfettered heartiness which characterised Colin George's regime, "Looking at one another just after breakfast and doing cabareters" is not his way. But the Nimrod idea of weekly company meetings he will be adopting.

With almost six months to go before he takes the helm obviously very little is finalised at this stage, but Armfield is convinced that with "a group of people with good imaginations and good heads, people who know why they are there, anything is possible."

Many have directed at a younger age than Armfield (Brook did his first London production at the age of eighteen), but few have been given such a prestigious and highly subsidised company to command at the age of twenty-five. With just a little time and the forbearance of the public, what must be seen as one of the greatest gambles of Australian theatre for some time, has a chance of paying off and putting the theatre company in the forefront: this making such so far questionable claims a reality.



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OPERA

Gypsy Baron and the future for opera

by Ken Hensley

After being part of a capacity audience just a week before Christmas at Canberra Opera's *The Gypsy Baron*, I recommended that models be struck for producer John Milson and musical director Warren Robbington. Only those who were not familiar with the work were grudging in their praise, but then they little knew what jubilation they might have experienced from *The Gypsy Baron* in less competent hands.

The overture was remarkable for the most meticulous playing I have heard from a Canberra pop orchestra. Musically the evening was always more ready than enough, with the chorus impressing as a stylish, full-voiced protagonist (Robbington, a musicologist and choral conductor from the Canberra School of Music is neither a flamboyant nor a rhythmically exciting conductor. But he is thorough and competent, a welcome exception).

The opera's best-known arias are familiar to those over forty as 'One Day When We Were Young', and 'Open Road, Open Sky'. The fact that both became popular with re-written lyrics is soon understood, the former song, a duet for the Baron and his gypsy princess, Saffi, is actually an evian tapestry — an exhaustive list of the feathered friends that witnessed the woodland wedding. That we released from laughing at the well-measured lyrics is a tribute to singers Geoffrey Harris and Heather Snadden.

Of interest possibly to devotees of the trials of the Austro-Hungarian wars of the mid-19th century, the story is without conscious humour, and the libretto is romantically weak. Both pursue love most warmly embracing by the final act curtain, with only the subsequent absence of the men in the war to make a dramatic tension until the end of the third act. Stasman and his librettist Ignaz Schobert made some attempt in parodying *Il Trovatore* by means of an ariel chorus (available in this production for a pair of well-tuned anvils) and an *ad lib* were Anzelm called Cope, given a stirring characterisation by Margaret Cleary.

Mention of ariel and cast strengths does not imply that either singing or acting was deficient in Canberra in December, even

though no single performer matched the star quality so often associated with successful opera in the role. Geoffrey Harris looked more dashing than he had a few weeks earlier in *Alcinaide* in *The Barber of Seville*, yet he remains especially an intelligent, reliable singer rather than one with an inherently beautiful voice. On the other hand, Christopher Bogg as Ottavio (the vocal analogue to Alfano, for those who wish to use *Der Fliegende Holländer* as a reference point) sounds like a student who will one day be a *prima donna*.

Gregory Yarnick, revelling in the rare chance to do some character acting, was a roddy, brawny, but athletic pig farmer, Zuppo. His Ballad of a Returned Soldier was one of the best-sung solo items of the night, and marked the end of a serious tendency of producer John Milson to stand his singers four-square, downstage centre for their solos in earlier acts.

Frank Booby looked and sounded charming as Anzelm (Bánk of Adèle still trying to transfer from *Der Fliegende Holländer* while Heather Snadden was undaunted by her first act costume (an awkward, hooped skirt), singing and acting with passion as

a sort of personified John Copley who always has things happening on stage, thus helping the audience to pretend that something dramatic might be about to occur. That Milson did with flair. He even lent some credibly to the choral confrontation of gypsies and villagers, which brings down the first act curtain to the threat of a sword brawl.

The Gypsy Baron is maximum theatre, strongly brought to a senseless of life by dedicated professionals abetted by a large, enthusiastic band of those who don't solely for love, the true amateurs.

OPERA IN THE 80s

While the output of the prolific Johann Strauss has little to tell us about opera for the 1980s, except pitfalls to be avoided, there is enough happening on our musical and other stages to point to desirable developments for opera.

The company that gave me most hope for contemporary opera was not an opera company, but the visiting Netherlands-based theatre group, Sali. Curiously, I doubt that the work of Jean-Pierre Vost and his polyglot actors will influence details of Australian acting or dancing styles. In his already, of course, stimulated some smaller groups in theatre to a second education and vigor.

In his treatment of grand themes, such as his adaptation of the *Orpheus*, Vost transcended the need for an audience to catch every word of spoken text. The analogy with opera begins to emerge. Vost maintains the great narrative sweep and the big emotions which are essential to opera. Sali uses physical movement, the cumulative effect of vocal sound, and some most-astounding music to say more than the mere words of a text can tell us.

Highly visual, and emotionally direct, but not relying on expensive sets and costumes for effect — this is how I would characterise the sort of theatre that should become opera during the decade. What Brian Howard did with Louis Nowson's *Power for Victoria State Opera* gives some indication of what can be done.

Although there is much in the production which irritates me, I commend producer Eliah Modshinsky's work with opera singers in the Australian Opera's current realisation of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He shows that singers can be directed to do much more than stand and deliver. Unfortunately, for my taste at least, he prohibits the use of the irony of the director in view of the Victorians introduced into the production. Neither Shakespeare nor Britten needs it.



Leo Claxton, Geoffrey Harris and Heather Snadden in Canberra Opera's *The Gypsy Baron*.

Saffi. The crucial placed high notes of her lag song, 'There is no Man on Earth', sounded shrill and uncomfortable, leading one to wonder who could both sing and act that role, and when such a lady were found, whether it would be worth her while.

Despite a noisy and altogether unnecessary lag machine at the beginning of the second act, producer Milson proved that his twice-delayed Canberra debut was worth waiting for. *The Gypsy Baron* needs



Bruce Lang and Margaret Chant in *Canberra Opera's* *The Gypsy Baron*

Despite its Victorian antecedents, the AG Dram is an excellent example of how dramatic values have risen in the work of our opera companies during the 70s. May there be no reactionary devaluation of that dramatic currency.

As if to demonstrate by citing an opposite, I believe that an indication of what opera can do is obliquely given by reference to the aims of Rex Chapman and his Shakespeare Company, now in Sydney in *Messiah for Messias* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* late in 1980. That company worked from a starting point of reverence for text. As music a rain-daisy strayed, especially in *The Two Gentlemen*, more often one felt that this was an noble enterprise with limited prospects. Such a loving devotion to details of text has no corresponding place in opera, it is the supra-textual sweep of Shakespeare that inspired Verdi and Puccini to their tragic of compression in *Otello*. Not disparaged for text, but inspiration mingling upon the already broad view of the conflict of protagonists—that is the sort of thing that opera librettos are best made from.

Among our established companies only Larry Sully has shown a determination and a skill requisite for the task of writing major operas in Australia. Like Leon Nowra, Sully does not look to the wallaby, the wombat, or the ocker for his subject matter. We can only await the treatment afforded his latest work, *The Griffin*, commissioned by the Australian Opera, and delivered to that company last year.

It is probably with the younger composers, those of Brian Howard's generation, that the brightest openings happen for they should be encouraged to write multi-side works for the regional companies, with funding adequate to encourage the best talent available for innovative work.

In this country opera lags perhaps ten years behind theatre in its acceptance of novelty, especially of new Australian works. There is no guarantee that in 1990 the lag will be less than twenty years. Among the reasons for this relative inability to adapt are the extra expense associated with preparing the music for new operas, the difficulty of adjustments that must occur in response to the presence of a new score, and the very nature of opera audiences. They are simply older, wealthier, and more staid than those theatre-going peers. Think of the subscribers to the Old Tote's last season, or the Musica Viva and ABC subscription audiences of the 60s.

The Report on Opera and Music Theatre commissioned by the Music Board of the Australia Council recommended, among other things, that Canberra Opera concentrate on 20th century works. But that company is not yet professionally funded, unless its subsidy is quickly increased five-fold its efforts to mount modern works will possibly dwindle as they the operas nor the company. I do not expect that whatever new company arises in Brisbane will be innovative in repertoire, while Perth has always relied on standard works for its very survival.

Which companies should be seeking our new composers and librettists? All of them, of course. But innovation is prohibitively expensive for the national company. Although one hopes and expects the AG to take Sully's commissioned opera seriously in terms of resources and numbers of performances (the same composer's short opera *Love* was shabbily treated in the latter respect), nevertheless, it is unacceptable that the future of non-standard operas, whether Australian or not and from wherever one lets with the regional companies which should be able more frequently to take some risk in the non-office in return for probable artistic kudos.

As it happens, I move with concern that both Victorian State Opera, where Richard Davall made his reputation with baroque works, and State Opera South Australia, where music theatre provided ready company identification, have both been forced by increasing subsidy to these audiences by offering more standard operas.

Both scenarios, where I saw productions by the Met, New York City Opera, Covent Garden, ENO, and Scottish Opera during 1980 and at the Australian Opera I trust that the growing interest of non-government sponsors will enable us to see approximately lavish productions of the 18th and early 19th century classics, directed and designed in a manner befitting the 80s. By and large the better singers have shown themselves capable of being directed. And we need those singers. The most convincing acting backed by nothing better than faulty vocal technique will neutralise the operatic stage. Those of us who have watched the apprenticeship served by such singers as Marilyn Richardson, Joan Carden and Donald Shanks know that opera stars are likely to take ten years to reach a peak after they are capable of sustaining leading roles.

In the field of operatic design I am constantly dismayed at the frequency with which Australian talent is passed over in favour of mediocrity from abroad in selecting artistic directors for our substandard legitimate theatres we have at last begun to overcome that posture of cultural cringe. Will opera as it does to often, once again lag behind? By all means let us have Truscott and Brian Thomson more and let us learn from designers of the caliber of Sobotka and even Ralph Kuhn (whose *Farmhouse* for the AG I admired). In the main, however, the special relationship that exists between director and designer needs to be fostered among local talent. Only then will an Australian style, arising inevitably because of our geographical isolation, be matured instead of being allowed to grow haphazardly.

If it is taken seriously by those presenting it, and not used merely as a vehicle for extravagance and show, opera should become a vital limb of our living theatre. There is something almost sacred about a performer standing one stage and, instead of speaking, beginning to sing. For me the members of Silk sang with their entire bodies in this country, where stage naturalism has been good for so long, we need an opera of an almost exotic vision. We also need dancers to work with such choreographers as Gaele Murphy and Don Asher, and in addition something that we have always lacked: a range of roles. Only then will we be able effectively to break the stronghold of naturalism in our theatre.

THEATRE/ACT



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SLEEPING TRAVESTIES

by Margaret Wells

Sleeping Beauty: The mood of a season of theatre from The Backyard Theatre by the Fools Gallery Theatre Company, Band House Theatre Workshop, Opened 26 November 1989

Director: Carol Woodhouse, Artwork, design and lighting: Jodie Woods, Production Manager: Richard Woodhouse, Costumes: Sallie Appleton

Cast: Lisa Rogers, Ross Cooper, Jo Fleming, Greg King, Jane McDonald, Ross McGregor, Marcella O'Brien, Mimi Staines

(Professional)

Reviewed by: Tom Ragozzini, *Fortune Theatre Company* in association with the Canberra Theatre Trust, Playhouse Canberra, 19-24 November 1989

Costume: Sallie Appleton, Set design: Peter Hamdy, Stage Manager: Kim Bowdler, Lighting design: Les Shapley

Cost: Henry Carr, Les Hammond, Trishie Tress, John Wainwright, James Joyce, John Cullen, Brenda Gordon, Marjorie, Queensland, Tamara Ross, Emily Jane Murray, Nancy Pat Wainwright, Laura Marie (Professional)

In the goldfish bowl that constitutes Canberra theatre, there has been a major environmental shift. Where formerly there was one fully professional theatre, the Jague Company (who call merely TJE work and rarely kept to the Public Eye) now there are three. Fools Gallery have been working underground for two years, surfacing only to produce a remarkable realisation of *Alice in Wonderland* in 1978, as a money-spinner. Now the second *Alice* in their four-play series, *Alice from the Backyard* has opened in Canberra and moved to the Festival of Sydney. Fortune Theatre, for several years relegated to the Canberra Theatre foyer at lunch hours, has grown up to the extent that it is now allowed to play in the Playhouse at night. Fortune's former hard core of ex-Rep stalwarts has softened (under financial blackmail) to admit new local actors and imported professionals, and with a parade

of imported directors this year has produced a season that promises well for a reasonable, though not stellar, regional theatre company in the future. The really good local actors who used to work with the Australian Theatre Workshop and occasionally with Canberra Rep have slid over to Fortune, leaving Rep to the Give-Your-Daughter-a-Whirl-on-the-Stage-Mrs-Worthington role that it has for many years peddled itself on not being relegated to.

The theatrical division of labour is becoming increasingly obvious, Rep for a nice night out seeing your friends enjoying themselves trading the boards in a little piece of dramatic forgery, Fortune for a



Fools Gallery Theatre Company's *Sleeping Beauty*

semi-intellectual lower middle class theatrical fix (they show signs of making it to real intellectual upper middle class standing shortly), and Fools Gallery for Serious Theatre.

This division of labour and of talent is very clear in the three companies' pre-Christmas seasons. Rep produced *Andrew and Elda*, directed by Pam Rosenberg. Very bad American accents, some very good and pretentious nattering and sight gags, seven or eight hours of balder, a very good standard Edwardian set, a lot of dazed, unfunny lines but a lot more extremely funny ones that even neglecting couldn't kill it. A not fashionable or theatrical refusal to write about the standard of the acting, the assumption is that we are all professionals together and that means we start off on a common basis from which there are a few flights of

bedance. In Canberra's goldfish bowl this is not true, and the theatrical boardroom cowed by the interesting impetuosity and quality of Fortune productions has left Rep with a quality control problem on its hands.

While Fortune productions are, however, there is a very marked variation in standard, ranging, in *Fortunes*, from a couple of rather wooden performances to the light-headed brilliance of Les Hammond's characterisation of Tristan Tzara. The superb idea of coupling *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Travesties* in a season, thus showing up the many parallels, parodies and petty plagiarisms, gave the season a real intellectual and 'history' fascination that neither play would have on its own. There were technical problems, the 'replies' when Henry Carr's brain slips and has to be forced to replay a flashback more in line with reality than with terrible mauling, often did not work. It was not clear until the third replay what was happening, when there did not work they continued (in a *Sleeping Beauty* moments of bedlam). But it was a pleasant production which showed real promise of a future studded with lower long, long evenings at home in the notorious Canberra Silent Nights.

Fools Gallery's *Sleeping Beauty* is a worthy successor to *Standard Operating Procedure* (24 December/January), and a startling contrast. Compared with the docile seriousness of *SOP*, *Sleeping Beauty* is a very funny and at times almost good humoured expose of the 'the myths of romantic love and family relationships, as perpetuated by popular culture ancient and modern'. It is a pretty production so pretty that the attractiveness of the myth the play is debunking becomes more compelling than ever. *Sleeping Beauty*'s glass coffin (in person and surrounded by a chocolate-ban pink box) was, for instance, extraordinarily pretty. Fools Gallery's world is full of the megalomaniac power of idealistic youth and their thorns can have a last test of poisoning to the converted. But it is the medium, not the message and in Carol Woodhouse's hands the theatrical medium is full of visual and verbal poetry.

Theatre in Canberra at the moment is a fascinating study in economic politics and sociology. Rep's grant has been cut, Fools Gallery have been, shamefully, refused any funding at all, and the only way in the agreement is that of the very loose groups that have been working on and off at the Canberra Playhouse, mostly under the pseudonym 'Fortune Theatre'. We await developments.

THEATRE/NSW



STATE REP
LUCY WAGNER
EXEC EDITOR

Dramas fit for heroes

CELLULOID HEROES A VERY GOOD YEAR

by John McCallum

Celluloid Heroes by David Williamson. Directed: Thomas Sydney Guyard. 3 December (Theatre). John Ball, Douglas Larry Eastwood, Lighting: Gregory Gossaway Murray. Cast: Al Sharston, Peter Coleman, Mike Foss, John Grogan, Ross Rodgers, Alan Wilson, Gary Brady, Hans Sasse, Maggie Meredith, Kate Fitzpatrick, Anne Murray, Barbara Stephens, Simon Scott, Brian Kavanagh, Dick Birdwood, Kevin Smith. (Professional).
A Very Good Year for Young Heroes: In *Celluloid Heroes*, long-time Sydney Opera's Director RHD (Director: Mike Rodgers, Designer: Mike Rodgers, Musician: Mervyn Drake, Choreographer: David Allen). Cast: Ben Hise, Terry Rodgers, Ted McAlister, John Clarkson, Julie Campbell, Anne Gogg, Mervyn Drake, Barry, the Poetess, Mervyn Drake. (Professional).

For people who believe that a country needs heroes, or, with Les Murray, that "men must have legends else they will die or strangeness", the beginning of December in Sydney last year was a busy rating time. Two plays - one called *Celluloid Heroes*, the other subtitled *Murphy Heroes*. Two writers whose relationship is sort of legendary (although perhaps not around-around-the-campfire material - "Did you ever hear the story of Williamson and I in a Ball?" - a bush descender, broken only by the drinking of flagons of rough red.) Two openings (attended by heroes) - one celebrating 100 years of Nimrod, with Young Mo jumping out of a cake, and the other on the day John Lennon was shot. As we descended into the foyer after *A Very Good Year* (memories of old Nimrod Booding back) some door - Ellis presumably - had put "Teenage" on the PA. All loudly and dangerous stuff.

Celluloid Heroes is very different from *Twentieth Century* - to be enjoyed for different qualities. Some reviewers have complained that the plot is convoluted, the

characters cartoon-like, and that it is inappropriate to write a farce with ideas on it (like Aboriginal rights). But Jack Danno Fr. Williamson has always worked on the boundaries between naturalism and satire. Even his "naturalism" is odd. (There's this young footballer, etc, and he gives his old foggy a cigarette, snuffs it's not a real cigarette, it's dope. Well it seems as how when the footballer was young his sister.) When he's writing overt satire, as he is in *Celluloid Heroes*, it's absurd to ask that the characters be "fully-rounded" or the plot realistically credible.

The confusion arises because like Aristophanes (who once brought Euripides on stage as a character) and William



William's *Celluloid Heroes*.

Wyndham (who once had a character run to the theatre to see a Wyndham play), Williamson keeps at least one foot firmly planted in the real society about whom and for whom he is writing. There's not much gone in satire otherwise. In *Celluloid Heroes*, which is very funny, was a group of film types (as familiar that there was much speculation at the party and in the gutter press as to which is who) alternately wheedling and crashing their way through various political and personal relationships to achieve their usually grubby ends. To do this they keep betraying each other and this is shown with such strength, and some racial outrage, that personally I didn't much care what they had for breakfast or whether they slept with their legs apart. As anchor points, there are a few, a very few, moments when they become rather embarrassedly loyal, or at least kind to each other, and this only makes more contemptible their generally selfish behaviour.

A tribe like ours needs stories like this

But, to the storytellers, there is a problem. Somehow in a set which was splendidly swathed in giant film stock, in a story which was hilariously contrived to reveal the power struggles, with characters with names like Nimrod Scall and Dick Birdwood, and above all with superb, stylish performances from a brilliant cast - people still expected human depth and warmth. Perhaps it is because it raises the strong criticism of his men behave our easier to take. Perhaps the satire style is not strongly enough established. Perhaps the traditional courtesying, which is supposed to attend conventional transition will in fact help this production - and save it from descending, as it occasionally does in the moments, into neo-naturalistic drag.

Among *Heroes* (I prefer the subtitle) I also unconsciously enjoyed - there must be something odd about me, Angus, some people wheeled that it was too long, the characters didn't interact, there was too much talk, and, again, this makes the point. The play is about failed idealism, about a time when people talked well, and in the play the characters talk well in a hall of wit and wisdom and a joy to hear to I wouldn't have any less of it. (Well, let's not go too far. I would have less of it - it is indeed hopelessly in parts of acts two and three.) What is that but in an Ellis play would we have pointed out to us such an explicit fact as that you cannot (Rodney Kipling's "If" to the tune of "Danny Boy")?

And you again there is a problem. There is so much of the far-fetchedness as characters sitting on the ground (drinking, you' flagons of rough red) and telling tall stories of the death of kings. The sweep of the play, recounting the deeds and dreams of decades past, is sometimes lost in the confusion of the characters' private lives. The attempt to relate the personal lives of the idealists to the political and social experience of their times (such as David Hume, and here Stephen Boyd (I can do) is the great task of our time.

Both these plays have such historic settings - the film world, and one of the literary salubrity in Sydney in the 70s. Both look at huge issues - how we betray each other and how we have lost our ideals. Both establish within themselves the standards by which the material should be judged - in the odd moments of loyalty in *Celluloid Heroes* and in the expression of useful ideals in *Murphy Heroes*. And yet both are trapped (not necessarily because of the writing) in a style which seems to make some errors come out wondering what the characters do off stage in bed at night.

I mentioned at the beginning that heroes had attended the openings. I didn't just mean Gough Wharrier. One of Alexei's characters asks "Who says there are only amateurs in this disillusioned age?" He was talking about film critics.

A very bold move

THE PRECIOUS WOMAN

by Michele Field

The Precious Woman by Louis Nowra, Sydney Theatre Company at Sydney Opera House, Opened November 11, 1988. Director: Michael Wharmston. Assistant Director: Louis Nowra. Designer: Judith Armitage. Lighting Designer: Tony Neumann. Composer: Sarah de Jong. Choreographer: Margaret Pappas. Stage Manager: Julie Nowra and Fiona Williams. Cast: So-ling: Robyn Nevin, Tony, Ho: Robert, Ho: Andrew Dunn, Dai Yu: Noel Herrmann, Chi Yu: Karen, Helen: Karen, Austin: Eric, Ann: Bill McPherson, Philip: Cliff Ashby, Wu: Robin Thompson, Patricia: Margaret Gillian Jones, Fu: Alan Tait, Mr. Simpson: Norman, Kaga: Gordon Anderson. Title: *Never Not Wandering* (Prose/sonnet).

The Precious Woman may be Nowra's most uncertain play. The odd use of times and places that seem "rooted" to Australian audiences is something of a distraction with Nowra, but in this play there is a strangeness that extends as if to a heavenly another here, not there. In its self-consciousness there are shades of Tzveti's plays, a kind of aggressive posturing which the actors are never sure they are handling well.

There is the only other Australian play this past year which compares to *The Precious Woman* for its attempt to reverse the trend toward reducing plot to situation or even to attitude. *The Precious Woman* tries to hold a lot of plot - a plot halfway between Shakespeare's histories and the *Greenses*, I thought. But almost inevitably, as the plot thickens the characterisations are diluted. And it is the stereotyped characters which are the play's greatest weakness. There is the driven but not unduly long, there is a club-footed giant of a son who succeeds him, there is a seventeen-year-old Englishwoman caught out of Southern Maugham is restaurant's daughter turned whore, there is a maid-servant who sings blithely while she dances with her master's dress, there is the faithful nanny with a very faint that's all too similar to Mary Poppins.

The one role that reached beyond the stereotype was So-ling, the Madam Mao figure. But, like the mother in Nowra's previous play *André de la Belle*, the role of So-ling collapses at the end of the play. In the last fifteen minutes of both plays the women must emerge as heroic figures - without friends, without the props of husbands, children and siblings. But just

at this point Nowra cuts them down to size by making them pathetic. Still, Nowra has written two very full roles for women in these plays - much more than Australian actresses are usually offered.

The weakness of the end of *The Precious Woman* is also linked to the end of *Crimo*, which Louis Nowra translated for the Sydney Theatre Company earlier this year. In *The Precious Woman*, the audience's reaction to the final address should be the reverse of *Crimo*'s. The dying swagman, supported in a woman's arms, is the villain here, but that Peter picture makes it hard for an audience to moment its sympathies.

So-ling is played by Robyn Nevin, and her best performance comes in the Mother Courage bit in the second act. *The Precious Woman* tells the story of a revolution and an equally successful counter-revolution. But these catchwords have even less coverage action than the clashing of swords in *Crimo*. There are Brechtian instructions of the carriage, but if you follow the actors' gaze the war is always being fought somewhere halfway up the mountain.

I personally would have liked more production, not only of the obvious seen that *Crimo* had, but also some backup to

emphasise in a way that the author and the director didn't attempt.

Nowra now seems to be going for blond-codedness. It is a very bold move - the kind of move which most playwrights make much later in their careers than this point in Nowra's. It is not a move towards simplicity, as it seemed to some critics. Or, at least, the simplicity paradoxically makes the film much harder for all but the best actors to speak. Some reviews of the play disparaged it for not having enough "poet", not having a more elaborate argument. But this is the point - that it does without a theme as much as it does without scenery.

For those who cannot leave the actors disconnected, I think I cannot recollect any actor in *Crimo* missing about for the emphasis within his lines. But the lines in *Crimo* were more elaborate and directed more to an actor. As I was reading the script of *The Precious Woman*, I imagined that many of the lines were going to be delivered in dry voices, open towards the end of the audience. But it didn't turn out that way, and my impression was that most of the actors were stabbing for emphasis that weren't there.

Richard Wharmston's first season with the Sydney Theatre Company has come full



Robyn Nevin, Karen McPherson and Karen McPherson (STC) *The Precious Woman*

the play's interesting symbols. For example, the gibbons which live in the trees around the place of So-ling's exile and torment her - that's a wonderful symbol but it needs to be reinforced, even if only in a soundtrack collage of gibbons screaming. On the other hand, those symbols to which the production did try to give substance were visualised awkwardly. The ghost of So-ling's husband emerging from the surf, or the peasant girl who refused to play her fiddle while her village burns, were both, as images, too painted and heavy-handed. As moments on the printed page, such images work well enough, but even a short appearance of a ghost onstage can be

cyclic. We are still a long way from productions like *The Dred Claw* and *The Lower Depths*, which seem more complicated because of the relationship they develop with their audiences, both alienating and attracting. But at least the Sydney Theatre Company has come to maturity in one short year, moving with an unbroken speed from the minutely flawless production of *The Same South* to a play which is both serious and topical. Although *The Precious Woman* is a far rougher horse, I was convinced while watching it that it is the sort of play from which the Sydney Theatre Company will eventually earn its reputation.

To be congratulated

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA MEASURE FOR MEASURE

by Dennis Higgins

The Two Gentlemen of Verona by William Shakespear
performed by Shakespeare Company, Everest Theatre,
Sydney Centre, Sydney, opened 7 November, with
Director: Rex Campbell, Design and Lighting: the
Company

Names: Drew Forsythe, Jennifer Hagan, Ron
Haddock, John Gaden, Robert Higgins, John
Hussey, Kerry Walker, Ruth Cracknell, Arthur
Dignam, Tony Mack
(Professionally)

In the November, 1980 Theatre Australia Rex Campbell explained the aims of, approaches used and discussions made by his experimental A Shakespeare Company.

Some of the fruits of their endeavours were displayed in performances of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Measure for Measure* in the Everest Theatre at the Seymour Centre during November and December. I must say at the outset that I found the Company's work deeply interesting, and revelatory of Shakespeare's art in ways unparalleled by any other production of his plays that I have seen.

The actors performed on a square-black thrust stage against a background of black curtains, with two entrance spaces. At centre back there was a small balcony for *Two Gentlemen*, which was replaced for *Measure* by a small room, with a portable bench and two stools for use as required. Nothing else at all. Costumes were similarly spare: mostly light-coloured tunics of Neocenes, slacks, ankle-length shifts, slip-on shoes or knee boots. The startling exception to this timeless dressing was the bright green hoods for the outlaws in *Two Gentlemen*, suggesting a merger between Robin Hood's merry men and the Rio Rio Klan, and accentuating other Giffonian cannishness. There were hardly any properties: a staff for Iuccio in *Two Gentlemen*, a travelling-bag to carry his dog, necessary letters, Bagdona's bagged head in *Measure*. There was unvarnished, uniform and harsh white lighting throughout both productions.

No concessions were made, then, to any endemic expectations of traditional or even modernist Shakespearean staging. On the level of interpretation the Company's approach was even more austere, most notably in its "unimposed directorial style" and in its finding against gender and type: with male actors in female roles

and older actors playing younger characters, or vice versa. Although these methods resulted in absorbing accounts of both plays, for various reasons they worked better with *Two Gentlemen* than with *Measure*.

One of the paradoxes of inverted casting that emerged from this *Two Gentlemen* was that it was harder to accept female actors as men than it was to accept male actors as women - and not because of the more obvious physical differences between the sexes. The heroines of *Two Gentlemen* are drawn in the courtly-love romance tradition of Italianate perfection, thus inevitably merely mirrors their spiritual qualities. This was perhaps one reason, notwithstanding the excellent ensemble work of this company, that the performances of Ron Haddock as Julia and John Gaden as Silvia stood out as delicate, sensitive and totally dissonant, in the strict sense of that term: they conveyed the coyness of their characters. On the other hand, Arthur Dignam as Julia's wastep-



Ruth Cracknell in *Two Gentlemen* of Verona.
Photo: Robert Suman.

woman Lucentio was a little too flattery and camp, seeking more in the character than was there (for example, in the scene in which Lucentio advises Julia on her proposed journey in male disguise to unlock the cruel Proton, Mr Dignam was engaged, whereas the text surely indicates playfulness).

As the symbolically named hero ("Valentine" denotes a faithful lover), Proton was a shape-changing Greek (sage), Jennifer Hagan and Drew Forsythe gracefully complemented the work of Ron Haddock and Gaden.

The greatest threat to the coherence of this production came from Kerry Walker as a young, pert and cheeky Speed, Valentine's manservant, and Ruth Cracknell's Luanga, whose scene with his dog Crab, eagerly manipulating an appreciative audience's sympathy, was very funny and appeared highly subversive of romantic sentimentality. As Crab Speedy (temporarily relegated to the "Thanks to" page of the programme) beautifully caught the ongoing spirit of the production: satirical eloquence.

Whether the production of *Two Gentlemen* evolved over most of the nearly six months' working life of the company, that of *Measure*, as Mr Campbell reported in the November, 1980 Theatre Australia, was allotted only a few weeks, and was largely cast along conventional lines. The difference was apparent, not in the quality of performance but rather in the total impact of the presentation.

Halfway through *Measure* there are such marked shifts in poetic and dramatic tone that it is difficult for an audience to keep the whole play in focus. "This production," said the programme, "does not attempt to resolve any of the other contradictions that may or may not exist within this text. The attempt has been simply to present the play in its fullness."

The performances of the by-players highlighted the absence of a controlling interpretive focus. My mental impression of Arthur Dignam's Duke was of unisex - is the actor, rather than the character. He delivered his lines in a consciously chopped-up, jolty way, and seemed generally at odds with his role. As the play went on, however, it appeared that this was an unisex Duke that is, Mr Dignam was crossing the human, rather than the symbolic aspect of the character: not the omnipotent ruler standing in for Divine Providence, but the frail man who could later be afflicted by a stubborn Lucentio, and who could finally ask Isabella to marry him - and be accepted.

Drew Forsythe, as the other head word all out for the inhuman self-control of the symbolically named Angelo - "This conventionalised decency" as Claudio calls him. This was a well-disseminated and carefully spoken, but rather under-determined performance.

Kerry Walker used a middle path between these approaches: her Isabella began quietly, but gathered force as it progressed, and there was some lost power and contentment in her exchanges with Claudio and with Angelo in the play's first half. And the final scene in which, though as yet unaware that Claudio still lived, she pleaded for Angelo's life, was quietly yet genuinely moving. These were, however, isolated discharges of dramatic energy in what was too often a low-voltage presentation of the Duke-Angelo-Isabella relationships.

The one notable failure in this *Measure* was Ruth Cracknell's Luana. Here the mirrored casting simply did not work, despite the intelligent recourse Miss Cracknell brought to the role. This wagger and the aptness were there, but Luana lives in his aggressively masculine actualised traits, which colour all his ups and downs, and to convey that a male actor is necessary.

Some general conclusions emerge from

my impressions of these two productions. Firstly, that the approaches adopted had the salutary effect of making audiences listen to the dialogue above all else. Secondly, the baroque of interpretation, both in planning and in performance, fell almost totally upon the acting. The actors rose admirably to this challenge: in both plays there was some of the finest verse-speaking that I have heard from Australian actors. The deliberate economy of movement and gesture had two effects: one, again to throw the onus of presentation onto the voice; another, to make the groupings of and spacing between characters, and the emblematic movements (notably using the diagonals and periphery of the stage), especially significant.

The whole enterprise seems admirable. Mr Compton and his company are to be congratulated, and I for one, hope to see more work of this kind.

Laughs at the expense of credibility

GOLDEN PATHWAY THROUGH EUROPE

by Anthony Barclay

Golden Pathway Through Europe by Rod Milgate
Ensemble Theatre, Sydney, opened 20 October, 1981



The Ensemble: *Golden Pathway Through Europe*. (Photo: Bruce Gellie)

Director: Brian Young, Designer: David Tate, Producer: Judith Adams, Assistant to Director: Zita Martin, Production Assistant: Michael Collins, Lights: George Wei-Cheung, Stage Manager: John Black, casting.
Cast: Herman: Alex Findlay, Chuck: Roger Corral, Fred: Judy Ferris, Joan: Kate Edwards, Malcolm: Harold Jones, Ron: Frank Hume, Diana: Jenny Ludlam.
(Continued)

It is hard to disagree with Leslie Rios' claim that Rod Milgate's first play, *A Refined Look at Existence* (1980) was the "progenitor of the New Wave in Sydney" theatre. That was early in the Jane Street history and was pointing the direction of things to come. *King O'Malley*, *Don's Pans* and *Nitroed* Of course result has changed since those heady days, and, in its own way, Milgate's third play *Golden Pathway Through Europe* reflects those changes. *A Refined Look At Existence* was sheer theatrical delight, consciously anti-naturalistic, drawing adventurously on *Europa*, *Brecht* and not a little of the absurdity of *Laurel*. In retrospect some of it seems a little naive but it was no less than that. *Golden Pathway Through Europe* is dated by contrast, a well made play, solidly based in realism, with a tendency to reach for laughs at the expense of credibility.

Golden Pathway is set in the outskirts of Paris where we meet three married couples - Americans, Australia, New Zealand - and one sandy haired boy. Simply the car has broken down and, in the early dawn hours, the couples take to the hotel for the day. Brian Young managed an excellent opening as the six characters struggled

onto the stage replete with all the customary minutiae one all too often encounters in American and American-like Grand Tour. Tired, overburdened with luggage and luggage it was all very funny. But this moment did not last for long and the scene degenerated into a minor encyclopedia of tourist jokes and "language problems" that left one clapping at much as the real thing does. It might have been a good idea to introduce us to the couples that way but it had about as much life as a night of shades at your relatives.

However, the action thankfully shifts to the couples' various bedrooms and dramatic interest is refocused. Firstly, Chuck and Sonny, the American couple, then Malcolm and Joan the Australians and finally Diana and Ron the New Zealanders are put under close inspection and the usual substance returns. Or at least appears at various moments. The point of all this is that the European experience is no great holiday from life, indeed some grown problems assert themselves with a vengeance. With the Americans it is Chuck's alcoholism and Sonny's desperate attempts to prevent its recurrence. That some married well with solid money from Roger Corral and Judy Ferris it moved nicely between domesticity and growing unease. But the climax - a long, angry-filled outburst from Sonny - though powerful lost its pace. It could have been played back without loss.

Harold Jones' Malcolm was the best piece of acting witnessed yet full of subtle tones, a testimony of devotion and repression with a quality of anguish. Kate Edwards' Joan was as comic as the port demanded but I found it all too much. OK that such a monster might board bags full of bread and jam left-overs all over Europe but too, too much when she talks about her properties in Victoria and Queensland and selling the terraces in Kings Cross!

The best piece of writing was reserved for the young New Zealand couple, Diana and Ron. A couple whose sexual attraction is a mask to not inconsiderable incompatibilities. Jenny Ludlam and Frank Hume gave fine performances in this all too familiar situation: napping and seduction made for interesting comedy. Finally, Alex Fieder's Herman, the dumb-man hotel boy, added fine touches of humor to the evening.

At this time of writing the Ensemble are yet another of Sydney's theatres to face the problems of trying to rebuild and accommodate the demands of the Board of Fire Commissioners. Hopefully by the time this goes to press the matter will have been solved in the theatre's favour. It would be nothing less than a tragedy to lose of see in any way restricted the activities of this country's second oldest professional theatre company.

Unselfconsciously old-fashioned

YOU AND THE NIGHT AND THE HOUSE WINE

By Barry O'Connor

You and the Night and the House Wine waxes dressed and seduced by Robyn Moore, Debra Rahemovic, Tony Sheldon and Tony Taylor: musical direction and piano: Max Lambert, designer: Robert Macauley, lighting design: Margie Wright, stage manager: Anne Heath (Photograph)

You and the Night and the House Wine are the ingredients for a late night party at the Memorial Downstairs. It's the kind of party you'd have to be invited to - wouldn't you? After traversing a wicker small dark space, where you jostle with nighty other people and juggle crates of vino at riotously calm tables, four hosts introduce you into enjoying yourself, prowling up

and down along two sides of the claustrophobic space. There are games, puzzles and quizzes, with prizes to be won, there are songs to sing along to, and a serialized pantomime of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" to hold your interest if you find the two hours of NONSTOP FUN hard to bear.

In effect *You and the Night and the House Wine* is a curious night of endless energy and entertainment, with four beautiful and talented people who seem dedicated to keeping alive the tradition of the old Philip Street Room. This is the kind of show that, despite the recently growing interest in cabaret (see August 14), Sydney hasn't seen for a long time. I wondered that I hadn't entered a comic capsule: Murray Taylor and Sheldon and Murray Rahemovic and Moore looked and sounded as though they'd taken one step beyond some time ago, and have been dancing to Porter and Gertrude ever since. This is not contrived nostalgia, it is simply unselfconsciously old-fashioned. Much of the material, while expertly executed, is of a chestnut brown hue. Jokes about Bob and Dolly Dyer (remember

them?) and quietly naughty allusions to Snow White about drugs, are just two examples.

The standard of the performance, however, is very high and the actors are well suited to coping with the various demands of melodrama, song and dance, even that, and fourway harmony - all very ably assisted by Max Lambert, the musical director and pianist. Much of the evening is not long shared jokes, but unexpected poignancy is to be found in a sketch about Santa Claus' lonely and neglected wife, a Finnish and Judy presentation of Judy Garland's career, and, Tony Taylor's moving rendition of "Hug Yourself A Merry Little Christmas." The voices, lyrics and faces work well together. Tony Sheldon's turn as a stand-up comic, telling the one about "The Man who comes into a bar with a beautiful woman on his arm..." is a tour de force. Debra Rahemovic's blues version of a Christmas Carol is a show-stopper. Robyn Moore must have the most beautiful lips in the world.

Great fun that, but I'd have liked less Louis Park and more sophistication.



From: Taylor, Debra Rahemovic, Robyn Moore and Tony Sheldon in *You and the Night and the House Wine*

THEATRE/QLD



STAGE REP
DON BATCHELOR

Blurred intentions and bad taste

ERROL FLYNN'S GREAT BIG ADVENTURE BOOK FOR BOYS

by Jeremy Ridgman

Errol Flynn's Great Big Adventure Book for Boys by Rob George. La Place Theatre, Brisbane. Opened November 11, 1990.

Director: Malcolm Haylock. Musical director: David Pyle. Design: Luke Roberts. Choreographer: Edith Ball. Stage manager: Elizabeth Davis. Cost: Errol Flynn, Stephen Preston, Lisa Taylor, Christine Hoppers and with Stephen Elliot, Neville Hopper, Suzanne Marshall, Anna McCreann, Stephen Preston, Kenneth Yallop, Michael Williams. (Photo)

Unhappy indeed is the land that has need of heroes and yet the search goes on, however dubious the qualifications of the candidates. Rob George's *Errol Flynn's formulaic myth-making bang-drama*, with shades of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* sponsored here last season, isn't the best example of which is the central premise of a valiant anti-hero masquerading as a megamachine, or is it the other way around? Being a respected writer of educational scripts, Mr George, I am sure, an honourable man, but in both plays he takes on then on with his roots-tooties, lovable, all-Other bastard and I am afraid the *Les Trois* has the lumbering of the latter have the play crashing through into the murky depths of blurred intentions and sheer bad taste.

It is difficult to be constructive about an ambivalent stud when the play's female roles consist of four all-singing, all-dancing beauties who occasionally come forward to play cartoon caricatures, and a bespectacled career-woman journalist who only manages to prove that she has used by keeping Flynn in the limelight and whose main job is to give the play its investigative narrative structure. Hence, lines such as "Flynn, You know me!"

"Les, I don't think I do yet" which might as well read, "I feel a second act coming on!"

In the closing moments, Flynn makes a fool of himself at the Oscar presentation (presumably watching him on those days by coming on drunk and ending up delirious a long complaint against the world that has disfigured him. Moving at the monologue is, and superbly handled by Stephen Hadden to cap an intelligent performance. It is not enough to tip the balance against the heroics of Flynn's earlier behaviour, or the generally celebratory tone of the play as a whole. As in *Les's First Agent*, the vast apocalyptic inside stories as a moral get-out clause rather than a dialectical scrutiny of the play's mores and abides here at the dramatic bankruptcy of the biographical narrative strain in our theatre.

The play's strength lies in the opportunities it offers an inventive director and a lively, multi-talented cast, both of which it gets here. On a last act of second rate art days and New Guinea too, Malcolm Haylock's cast of nine move through inventively choreographed routines, witty canons and a dozen's nightmare of costume changes, all with poise and sparkle. Stephen Preston, a man of a thousand accents, shines in a rapid series of sword fights, as a different villain in each. It's Les, it's they said. But I've seen that I learnt any more than I did from a comment by Flynn's daughter in a recent press interview concerning her childhood memories of her then fifty year old father.



Stephen Hadden, Anna McCreann and Stephen Preston in *La Place's Errol Flynn's Great Big Adventure Book for Boys. Photo Michael Hopper*

"Dad used to sit me on his knee. He was a real tease and was always pulling my skirt." Lucky girl!

A good bang-up finish

CRUSHED BY DESIRE

by Don Batchelor

The QTC is now in series preparing for what looks like a highly interesting 1981.

The Company is justly proud of the success of its 1980 drive for subscribers, and tells of them as a "family". In their final offering for 1980, *Crushed By Desire*, there is no doubt that the family felt very much at home. They were ready and eager for the theatrical confession (the show often, everything was done to hold them to the Company's ample bosom, and the response was warm and fulsome.

I arrived in the SGIO Theatre with the best-laid of subscribers who are so rapidly covered for by the QTC child-minding service. The scheme, which provides a free bus to and from a child-minding centre for selected evenings during any season, is just an example of caring for the subscriber family.

A less successful touch was the recorded "compliments of the season" message from QTC Director Alan Edwards, delivered in pompous tones which suggested our mental age might have been eleven.

The show was directed with wit and vitality by John Wilson whose talent for musical theatre has been well demonstrated in Brisbane. Graham MacLean's design dressed the play in crisp stylish garb. Wilson had thoughtfully included Brian Stacey's manuscripts in the action where possible which enhanced an already good musical feeling.

There was some engaging singing by Gays MacFarlane and Maureen Peadar, and an old trouper's performance of an old trouper by Raymond Dupart.

But the highlights of a glorious evening were Geoff Cartwright's moving conclusion as Inspector Casanova which is further evidence of his range, and an outstanding performance by Duncan Watt (Sir Geoffrey Squerre) who with the ease that requires great skill evoked the ambience of the music hall in the so-blow formality of the SGIO Theatre.

All told a good bang-up finish to the year.

THEATRE/SA

Comedies of boredom and loneliness

A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY TALLEY'S FOLLY THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS

by Michael Morley

A Month in the Country by Iren Furgerson. 'State Theatre Company at the Playhouse Adelaide SA. Opened October 31 1985 Duration: Nine Days. Director: Sue Russell. Lighting Design: Nigel Jennings. Stage Manager: Wayne Kelly. Cast: Johnnie John Stoddard, Anna Myra Noble, Natalie Anna Volkov, Kelly Ross Bagdale or Joseph Scott, Vera Susan Lyons, Frances Dowling, Michel Robert Alexander, Ben School Peter Schwartz, Edwyer Philip Quaid or James Loner, Kenneth Marie Glynn, Marion Mel Cole, Robynston Peter Coleman. Dr Stoppigley. Wayne Bell. (Professionals)

Folly by Lancelot Wilson. The Stage Company at The Space Theatre. Adelaide Festival Centre. Opened November 18 1985 Duration: Nine Days. Director: Bruce McKeandry. Stage Manager: Ross McKeandry.

Cast: Matt Freedman Wayne Bell, Sally Talley. (Professionals)

The Christian Brothers by Ron Blum. 'Stage Company at Theatre at Opened November 18 1985 Duration: Nine Days. Director: John Noble. (Professionals)

While it is now common to view Furgerson as a forerunner to Chakhan, there is a sense in which both his prose work and his plays are a step farther on. For if Chakhan can be said to be the chronicler of boredom and the purveyor of the past and the present at a continuum, Furgerson is more the anatomist of boredom, a director of moods and attitudes, who shows us the past behind the present. The central character in *A Month in the Country* are both the products of their past. But their present reactions and feelings are either - as in the case of Natalie - an immediate and out of proportion that the past need never have happened or - as in the case of Rakitin - an obsession by past experience and rained to what he expects from the present, that anything new and unexpected can only evoke past bitterness and the dangerous tangle of bewilderment and self-doubt.

Nick English's production rightly concentrated on the Natalie Rakitin relationship, but needed rather to see these two as the serious core of the piece, while

allowing the subsidiary characters to slip into caricature. There was a feeling that character like Rakitin and Stoppigley should have been less muted, more engaged - especially in the past of the latter.

This is not to suggest that Robert Alexander's reading of Rakitin was inappropriate or superficial - quite the contrary. His scenes with Anna Volkov encompassed a range of moods from the stolid to the ironic, the graceful to the humorous, and Anna Volkov's Natalie was quite simply the best performance from an actress on this stage in ages.



Wayne Bell and Debbie Latta in Talley's *Folly*. Photo: Grant Horvath

Natalie is selfish, but Anna Volkov made her so engaging that every over-emphatic wave of the hand or toss of the head, every selfish plea for understanding and support, was completely appropriate and quite captivating. And Alexander's Rakitin approaching at times a Hamlet-like sense of disillusion and apathy of the will, was yet another well gauged characterisation from an actor who has been one of the season's major surprises. One would not much to see him as Henry Higgins or Dr Schen in next year's programme.

The other performances were mostly efficient without being inspiring, though Peter Schwartz's Schen, Peter Carrigan's Belkhouse and Myra Noble's Anna were real winners; and, as the young lovers, Sue Lyons and Philip Quaid managed to combine emotion with gaiety/boredom without tipping over into charmless or adolescent sentimentality. Sue Russell's dialogues were elegant and spare, and if there was one major omission to be made it would be that

the comic atmosphere of the whole play went for less than it should.

The idea of a group of characters, isolated and seeking for something in themselves and in their situation also provides the central motif for Lancelot Wilson's play *Talley's Folly*, though in this case, as it is only a two-hander, the audience comes closer to the effects of loneliness and lack of direction on individual lives - here the 31 year old nurse Sally Talley from the mid-West, and the 43 year old accountant Matt Freedman from St Louis. Both are lovers, both seeking contact, both having the scars of the past but prepared, especially in Matt's case, to place hope in the future.

The time is 1944 and after a year's absence, punctuated on his part by numerous letters, Matt has driven down to Lebanon to persuade Sally of what he has already persuaded himself - that he is the right thing for her. The play charts the progress of the characters' move towards awareness of their own longings and towards contact with another human being. It is funny, moving, cleverly - maybe even too cleverly - constructed and basically fairly conventional.

Wayne Bell's Matt is typical without being caricatured. Jewish, self-aware, and making his uncertainty with an array of conversational tricks and imperfections, he is an engaging creation. And Debbie Latta's Sally - from the sharp to the soft the humorous to the mournful - is well caught in her performance. Debbie Latta's Sally is equally impressive, though one would have thought she'd have been a catch in any community, let alone Lebanon, Missouri.

However she perfectly captures the character's sense of pain and uncertainty, her brittleness, her caring, her marital-obsessions. In fact it is these qualities that make the play so rewarding. Wilson does not create his characters to two or three moods or qualities. They shift back and forth and the dialogue reflects early and eloquently the evolution of tensions between the two. It's an ultimately encouraging play and though the two performers deserve major credit, John Noble's direction, allowing them and the play time to catch the rhythm and Bruce McKeandry's beautifully dispirited backstage *quid jolly* of the title with its firework and stained glass windows, both contribute to a fine evening.

No space to do other than say that John Noble's *Christian Brothers* took nothing in comparison with Peter Carroll's famous reading - no mean achievement, this.

THEATRE/VIC



STATE REP.
ELAINE
TURNER

A problematic success

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER

by Colin Duckworth

The Man who came to Dinner, by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman. Melbourne Theatre Company, at the Athenaeum Theatre, opened 26 November 1988. Cast: Mrs. Elvira W. Stanley, Ross Margolis; Mrs. Fanny, Marion Edwards; Richard Stanley, Patrick Frost; Jane Stanley, Nolan Davies; John, Michael Edgar; Kate's Aunt Charlotte, Ms Stanley Anthony Hamilton; Maggie Carter, Linda Wilkinson; Dr. Braxton, David Ravenwood; Sheridan Whitehead, Frank Thring; Warren Stanley, Jacqueline Kellner; Bob Jefferson, Rod Mulvaney; Leonard Sheldon, Kerry McGuire; Beverly Carlson, Frederick Pandorf; Ralph Cary Brown, and Mr. Johnny Quinn, Michael Roman; and Trevor Hayward. Director: Susan Collins; designer: Anne Frewin; lighting design: Murray Taylor. (Previews only.)

If this production was successful, it was perhaps not for the obvious reasons. When one is dealing with a script as well tried and popular as this one, and with an actor as skilled and talented as Frank Thring, one's clearly into the time-worn phase right away, and a certain off-centred funniness, a sense of disparity between what one should have been seeing and hearing, and the actual performance, was evident throughout, stemming partly from the manifest differences between the real-life Alexander Woolcott and his handsome Sheridan Whitehead, as personified by Mr. Thring.

Admittedly, it is not easy to characterise a living model as dynamic and self-contradictory as comic dramatic Woolcott seems to have been: unusually sensible, agreeable, sentimental, warm, affectionate, tender, loyal and generous but also capricious, wilful, spoiled, egotistical and asinine. The problem for the actor is to reveal all the latter less than lovable qualities, and yet remain poignantly worthy of the affection of his friends and sympathy of the spectators. Mr Thring's dark satiric leer and unobtrusively rascalic cha-

racterisation of Whitehead made it hard to believe that he could be inspired by any emotion deeper than unalloyed self-interest.

Arch-tritagonist and legman Sheridan Whitehead, having for once accepted an invitation to dine in a private home whilst on one of his Blue Rime Circuits, remains unapologetic (but potentially anxious for his host) as he sits in his back stairs area by slipping on the icy front doorstep. Wheel-chair-ridden on the orders of the local GP, there he must remain for the duration of the play.

It is the realisation of this tentacular paraplegic Buddha-figure into the domesticity of the very ordinary, albeit well-off Stanley family, in mid-twenties Ohio, that provides the comedy. The plot, on the other hand, is set in motion by Whitehead's irreplaceable P.A. Secretary, Maggie (whose attractiveness and unstuffed efficiency are convincingly portrayed by Linda Wilkinson). Her enforced stay quickly develops into a love affair with

Bert, a journalist anxious to interview the great Whitehead. The conflict between Whitehead's determination not to lose his secretary and Maggie's equal determination not to be tricked begins when she tries to transfer her allegiance from her modest lord-and-master to her new-found love, reaching the intensity of a pseudo-feminist power struggle. All a farce in this love-and-war intrigue, as Whitehead and Maggie engage manoeuvres of doubtful loyalty to assist or hamper the course of true love.

The whole situation is based on an improbability: anyone who, like Whitehead, wields enough influence to get star actors, actresses and TV summits to visit him in the cultural outback of Erieauan, Ohio, would certainly stand for the best of medical advice from New York, or even charter an airplane to take him back home. But if he did that, there would be no play, no love story.

The problem of intensifying the spectator's interest in the outcome has to be



ATC's *The Man Who Came To Dinner*. Photo: David Parker

involved partly by the attractiveness of the lovers (Red Matlow matches London Williams here, in both roles) and, in contrast, partly by the sheer obscenity of Mr Stanley and the nauseating defence of Mrs Stanley (not quite strongly enough brought out), and mainly by the characterisation of the central role. Is he to be a villain (arrogant and cold (unrequited) or to have a selfless hand in his spiced iron glove? A Rex Harrison would have given him glimmerings of endearing qualities — in Monty Woolley did in the film version.

The two most outstanding and memorable points, apart from the strong but one-dimensional performance of Mr Thing, came from Kerry McDermott in the outrageously colourful and juba (happy) comical scenes, Lorraine Sheldon, and Frederick Pierslow, whose Beverley Carlton was witty, acerbic and charming enough to make him a clear contender for the main part, should Mr Thing ever have the unwanted misfortune to break a leg. Gary Down's Harpo-like Banjo was a great, if slightly forced, delight.

Crisp and pacey

NED KELLY'S SISTER'S TRAVELLING CIRCUS

by Suzanne Spanner

Ned Kelly's Sister's Travelling Circus by Frank Harberley. The Prism Theatre Melbourne. Opened November 1980. Characters: Nicholas Lorraine and Bob Theonycroft. Producer: John Butler, Musical Director: Valerie Levanowicz. Danny Nash and Ensemble: Matt Bannan, (Original Music: Johnny Bannan, Costumes: Ross Chung, Cast: Ray Kelly, Valerie Levanowicz, Ross Moore, Peter King, Denise, Musicians: Ned Kelly, Danny Nash, Mike Singleton, Richard Healy, Maggie Gray, Leslie Ford. Finbar O'Toole. Denis Moore plus some twenty other characters shared amongst the cast.

On 11 November 1880 Ned Kelly was hanged. Meanwhile his sister Kate was on that same evening, performing, with a motley collection of theatrical *néf* do wells, scenes from her brother's life and death. Whether it was sibling pride or rivalry (she mistreated her), she hawked the show throughout Victoria telling the "true" story with the "real" armour and so the characterisation of the Irish Working Class hero began. Kate's desire to tell the Irish side of the story was no doubt genuine, but it was flavoured by a shared commercial sense, and it could similarly be argued that the APG decision to commission London based Australian writer Frank Harberley to write yet another Kellyiana piece for the Kelly Centenary was equally patriotically and commercially inspired.

I had seen Harberley's previous work

The Rigger Show performed at The Playbox last year and had found a sadly lacking and I also felt that Ned had not only been hanged, but more recently hogged to death as well, so I did not greet the announcement of this show with as much glee as I might have. It was, however, pleasantly surprised. I still do not think that Harberley is a particularly exciting stylist, nor is his perception an analysis of historical figures as, say, Bernard Pomeroy, but he can keep a play rollicking along and if the direction is as tight and well-lit as in this case, it works very well. Like *The Rigger Show*, *The Travelling Circus* is structured as a play within a play.

In this production the increasing emphasis on Finbar's impending capture by the police for his Republican activities seriously revealed what a posturing Irish lackey Johnny Masters Ned Kelly was, and forced Kate to finally take a stand for Ireland and Freedom, but it meant that the play became decidedly romantic and the costume of the hero figure was sacrificed.

Ned Kelly's Sister's Travelling Circus marks the end of the Ensemble's first year and it is undeniably their best production. Its success lay in the beautifully crisp and pacy direction of Nick Lorraine and Bob Theonycroft, the spacious and sparsely elegant set or rather lack of sets, and the



The APG Ensemble in Ned Kelly's Sister's Travelling Circus

and just imposes the two presumed realisms.

In both plays Harberley uses the device of the outsider, stranger to "the pan", who in the course of the scenes is revealed to be the "real". In *The Rigger Show*, it was Jack himself who played himself, and in *Ned Kelly's Show* it is Finbar O'Toole who is the only real Irish person. Again in both cases where this "stranger" does it to upset the fragile correspondence between the realisms and in so doing reveal the truth to which the other characters will go in their "play". It is obviously a very effective way of provoking dramatic conflict. It is also potentially politically reflective but risks disrupting the stylistic skin of the play to the point where the focus dissipates.

given priority of the cunning which exploited strengths and masked weaknesses. Finally and it may seem a small point but it is not, it was a musical and the actors sang well and together.

It must be a tribute to the directors, and to the Ensemble's long-earned "ensemble-ness" that with the exception of Peter King (who was well cast as a hammy actor), it would be impossible to choose the best performance of the show. Danny Nash's Ned and Valerie Levanowicz's Kate were well observed and contained, while Richard Healy, Lesley Court and Denis Moore created some finesse and fire between them and of those Healy's Mayor and Moore's Finbar were memorable.

THEATRE/WA



STILL TOP
JOAN MARCUS

A fast-paced and intelligent production

VANITIES

by Cliff Gillam

Written by Jack Hedrick. The Hole in the Wall, Perth WA. Grand November 12, 1980.
Director: Peter Morris. Design: William David. Stage Managers: Richard Hazley and Jane Newby. Cost: Mary Leith Taylor, Joanne Jenny Stahl, Kathy Aiko Piper. (Professionally)

There are not, to my knowledge, very many full-length plays which offer only three female parts. *Vanities* does, and while one could hardly pretend that any one of the parts offers much of a challenge for any skilled actress, at least an opportunity is there for three actresses to stretch out and show their skills. The play traces the lives of three high-school friends from their first days in high school through college in the late sixties to maturity in the mid-seventies. Apart from a pre-occupation in the second act with the anatomy of the American college system's traditions of Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities, the sad scramble of the three girls to grow up in terms of adults already outdared in the culture around them moves with increasing momentum in engagingly and sympathetically chronicled by the writer Hedrick. And he is canny enough to have worked in both the pathos and the sure-fire punning gag which guarantees the kind of commercial success this play has enjoyed in America.

To note that only one of the characters undergoes any real development during the course of the action, and that the ending of the play offers the audience a generous mystery about "the way the lives now" is probably, given the mass-audience the play seeks, to avoid unnecessarily.

The Hole-in-the-Wall production was distinguished by some fast-paced intelligent direction, and excellent design, as

well as by three very finely-tuned performances. Director Peter Morris, confronting the problem of requiring a decade of aging in his cast, and the problem of Southern American accents, proved more than adequate to both. I was unable to understand the decision made to re-open the first minute of Act Two at the post-interval opening of Act Three until I realised that such a move allowed for the third on-stage make-up and costume change in front of the vivacious (dressing-table) which dominated the act. Even so, I still thought the move a little heavy-handed, the one error of judgement in an otherwise good directorial job.

As Kathy, high-school cheer-leader, college acronym organiser, and dropout physical teacher in seventies New York, Aiko Piper had the most demanding of the three roles, made as the character does develop. She gave a well-observed and sensitive performance managing the play's crucial scenes, when Kathy at the end of Act

Two notices that she has "no decision here", with an understanding delicacy. As Mary, whose sexual drive and desire for independence lead her too soon to a sophisticated loneliness, Leith Taylor was excellent, fleshing out a fairly stock character with emotional evasiveness and performance style won from great skill and long experience. As Jo-anna, conservative stay-at-home "home-maker" too frightened to encounter the truth of all the excitement of her realized fantasy of home and family, Jenny Davis was superb. The interplay between all three actresses in the last act, when Jo-anna's and Mary's extremes clash against Kathy's explanatory truth-to-self, was superb, a delight to watch.

All told, the Hole's production of *Vanities* must be counted a directional and performance success, making of an essentially thin play an engaging, accessible, sometimes funny, sometimes sad right in the theatre.



Leith Taylor, Joanne Davis and Aiko Piper in *Vanities*

BOOKS



BY JEFF
MAY 1991 51

Travelling North, by David Williamson
Cicerone press, r.p.p. \$4.95

I have some trouble critically reviewing David Williamson's plays because when I sit down to read them I get so immersed in the action and the world of the play that I completely forget to be analytical. That is a very nice problem for a critic to have.

I was going to say, for example, that Williamson is not nearly so naturalistic as everybody seems to think. The gaps, the nearly farcical situations, and, in *Travelling North* the sometimes comic-like montage of scenes are, as Brian Kavanagh once pointed out, not usually thought of as components of a naturalistic style.

I was going to say something about *Travelling North* being the beginning of a new mature period in his writing. Freed from the limitations of contemporary action, and covering a much wider range of social and personal experiences than any single previous play, *Travelling North* brings a new human and political dimension to Williamson's comments on the Australian scene. The individual conflicts between Frank and Frances and their children reflect general political conflicts. The play compares the old guard, idealistic radicalism of Frank's generation and the new materially self-interested generation, of their children, who also William but who have usually lost the old idealism. Frank expects great things of William but knows that he himself is too old to take any part in the new era. It is nice that he lives long enough to vote in 1972.

And I was going to say something about the social map of Australian life drawn by Williamson over the last 30 years. While Frank and Frances are preparing to fall in love, elsewhere in Melbourne Robbie is fighting political battles in his Department and worrying about his towing tank. As Frances' children try to persuade her not to go with Frank, Don Henderson, in *Lower Plenty*, is dressing up for his party. Three years later, on the night of the next election, Frank will die. Graham, in *Jugglers Three*, will just have returned from Vietnam, and, in Frances' travels



further north, Andrew Collins' career as a novelist will be taking off. blessed by the Whitten period which Frank, Don and the rest expected. The fact that Williamson's plays can evoke this sort of odd, real-world speculation is a tribute to their great social authenticity and richness. Like Frank on a personal level, Williamson draws together the threads of Australian social and political life in the early 70s and makes sense of it all.

But as I started to re-read *Travelling North* these thoughts departed. The excitingly fragmented action draws you along, exploring the hopes, needs and responsibilities of two generations of Australians. So I'm not going to review it, but simply say that if you were one of the very few who missed the ubiquitous Nimrod production then you will want to read it, and if you see the show, then go out and buy the book.

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THEATRE 3 (47-4222)

Canberra Repertory: *Count Dracula* by Ted Toller, Director, Pam Rosenberg, Design, Russell Brown, Special effects, Tony Ackeroff February 11 - March 14

COMBINO THEATRES

Opening on Broadway written and directed by Trevor Finlay, Director, Lorraine Francis, Producer, Mark Emerson January tour of south-west Victoria closes February 7 at Theatre 2

DANCE

CANBERRA THEATRE (47-4222)

Festival of Perth/Canberra Theatre Trust presents: *Saga, Naois and Squalor* with Sorliana Seivova February 17-21

PLAYHOUSE (49-6408)

Don Acker's *Motion Video Dance Company*, Feb 23-28

For artists contact: Margarette Wells on 49 7600

NSW THEATRE

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357-6611)

School Tours

The Book Book Theatre Company, drama for infants and primary. Metropolitan area from Feb 9

Jon Staggford, *Reptiles of Australia* for infants and primary, Orange from Feb 2 and metropolitan area from Feb 9

Norman Bray, Puppets and Puppetry for infants and primary. From Feb 9

Jennifer Hope, mime artist for infants, primary and secondary, Riverina from Feb 9

Mr Juppert's Children's Theatre (mime, drama) for infants and primary, South Coast from Feb 9

Jon Carter, for infants and primary. North Coast and Hunter from Feb 9

Sidetrack Theatre Company for primary and secondary. North West and Hunter from Feb 9

BONDI PAVILION THEATRE

(38-7211)

A musical evening by Teasheet Productions. Until Feb 14

THE DRAMA STUDIO SYDNEY

(662-8555)

Seymour Centre Dances

Sole a group created work directed by Tim Holme. Feb 4-14

ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929-8177)

David by Howard Brechen. Kim Campbell, Trevor Griffiths and David Hare, directed by Brian Young. Until Feb

FRANK STRAIN'S BULL N' BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (358 1888)

With Noel Brophy, Barbara Wyndon, Garth Meade, Neil Bryant and Helen Loran, directed by George Carden. Throughout Feb

GENESIAN THEATRE (55 5641)

End of the Beginning directed by Barry Hayes, *Shadow Story* directed by Pamela Whelan, and *Hell of Healing* directed by Margaret Renwick. Until Feb 14

The Vigil by Ludmila Fodor, directed by Colleen Clifford. Commences Feb 28

FEELS GALLERY (264 7888)

Cleveland Street Performance Space: *Sleeping Beauty*, devised by the company, direction, Carol Woodrow. To Feb 7

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (612 3411)

Evita by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, directed by Harold Prince, with Jennifer Murphy, Peter Carroll, John O'May and Tony Alvarez. Commences Feb 14

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (26 2538)

Company in rehearsal

SIRRIHILL PUB THEATRE (92 1415) Sirrihill Hotel, Maitland's Point

The Private Eye Show by Perry Quinlan and Paul Chubb, music by Adrian Morgan, lyrics by PP Chaney, directed by Perry Quinlan, with Zoe Barram, Jane Hamilton, Patrick Ward, Bill Young and Michael Ferguson. Throughout Feb

MARIAN STREET THEATRE (498-4983166)

A Red Fall of Fingers by Dave Freeman, directed by Peter Williams. Commences Feb 4

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE

Jordan Our Promise directed by Peggy Mortimer, with Ron Fraser, Maggie Stuart, and Lee Young. Commences Feb 4

NEW THEATRE (519 3403)

Colonial Experiences by Walter Cooper, directed by Frank McManus, with Peter Tulman and Marty O'Neil. Throughout Feb

NIMROD THEATRE (699-5003)

Upstairs The Choir by Errol Bray, directed by Neil Arnold, with David Atkins, Simon Burke, Tony Sheldon and Emma O'Arcy. Throughout Feb. Commences *Death of an Archer* by Celia Fox. Directed by Bruce McGregor, with George Whaley, Deborah Kennedy, John McTernan and Tony Taylor. Commences Feb 11. *Last Night Show*. Lee Ringbaker. Commences Feb 11

NEW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200)

Therefore for primary schools and The

Unlived World of Jasper Lemmon for secondary schools, both directed by Ian Watson, with Nola Colefax, David London, Colin Allen, Bill Eggenshaw and Rosemary Leves. Throughout Feb

Q THEATRE (0417 21-3735)

Private in Parade by Peter Nichols. At Perth from Feb 17

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY (999 25 2032)

Contact theatre for details

THE ROCKS PLAYERS (349 0323)

Car, Marine & Reswick Sts, Leichhardt
Female Transport by Steve Gooch, directed by Julie Dastmooz. Commences Feb 14

SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR

YOUNG PEOPLE (588 3948)

Shopfront Theatre Tooting. Company touring metropolitan and country areas with *The Fair Play*, directed by Don Murray and *The Third World Women Show*, directed by Michael Webb

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

(228 5988)

Drama Theatre, SOH *The Man From Manksson* by Dorothy Hewson, directed by Rodney Fisher, with Ruth Cracknell, Maggie O'neil, Judi Farr, Colin Ersk, John Gidson, Ron Haddnick, Jane Harders and Neil Blackburn. Commences Feb 5

THEATRE ROYAL (221 6111)

Celluloid Heroes by David Williamson, directed by John Bell, with Peter Summer, Helen Saps, Kate Fitzpatrick, Robin Ramsay, Kevin Smith and Barbara Stephens. Until Feb 21

OPERA

THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA

(29 5841)

Opera Theatre & Concert Hall SOH *The Rape of Lucrece* by Benjamin Britten, conducted by David Krieger, produced by Moffat Donohoe. *Otello* by Verdi, conducted by Carlo Felice Cilliano and produced by George Ogilvie.

The Beggar's Opera by John Gay and adapted by Beazley and Gamley, conducted by Richard Bonyngs, produced and designed by Anthony Beish and John Bickerton. Commences Feb 7

La Bohème by Puccini, conducted by Carlo Felice Cilliano, produced by Andrew Sinclair and designed by Tom Lingwood. Commences Feb 10

DANCE

THE SELWICK CENTRE (642 9555)

Evening Theatre: Steps, Normans & Squares with Maria Gelgad. Until Feb 6

QLD

THEATRE

ARTS THEATRE (38 2944)

The Ambles Ferry by Harold Pinter, director, Fred Wesley, designer Greg Katakasis. Feb 5-Mar 14

Pamela's Paragon by Bernard Shaw, director, Sandra Hale. From Feb 14

LA BOITE THEATRE (38 8622)

The Rainscar Man by Nick Barnes, director, David Bell. From Feb 13

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

COMPANY (321 5975)

SGIO: Aeneas by Thomas Morfan, Charles Sidons, Martin Clavin, director Alan Edwards

TN COMPANY (322 5131)

Masquerade by William Shakespeare, director, Bryn Nason, with Geoff Cartwright, Judith Anderson, Jennifer Blockidge

For further contact Don Becherle on 338 9211

SA

THEATRE

CORE THEATRE COMPANY

(272 3036)

Touring Metropolitan area

The Shikano Chip On Your Shoulder Show by Allen Lynn. Feb 1-14

SHERIDAN THEATRE

The Caretaker by Harold Pinter, director, Wade Matthews. Feb 28-Mar 7

LA MAMA THEATRE

Crawford Lane, Hindmarsh
The Caretaker by Harold Pinter, director, Bruno Kerr. Feb 23-Mar 7

STAGE COMPANY

Spencer Theatre Festival Centre

Run Mr Goodnight's Stranger Major by Bruce DeBussan. To Feb 28

STATE THEATRE COMPANY

(31 3151)

Theatre 62, Hilton

Upstairs Down At The Bottom Of The

World by David Allen, director, Kevin Palmer, designer, Ken Wilby, Lighting Nigel Levinge. Feb 11-28

The Playhouse, Central Centre

A Hard God by Peter Konrad, director, Neil Knight, designer, Bill Haycock. Lighting, Nigel Levinge. Feb 12-28

TROUPE

Unity Town Hall

Backyard by Jan Balogh, director, Keith Gallach. Feb 12-Mar 7

Benbow Bender by Barry Dickins, director, Keith Gallach and Richard Collins

OPERA

Q THEATRE (221 3551)

85 Hobbs St

Paradise Paravento by Ian Taylor, director, Richard Treasack, musical director, Neil Weber. Feb 14-Mar 31

For further contact Elaine Bell on 267 1088

TAS

THEATRE

POLYGON THEATRE COMPANY

(34 9018)

Sole Be Sole Be Sandstone, director, Oen Gay, with Patricia Ashcroft, Oen Gay, Norman Le Maitre and John Phelps. West Coast. Feb 3-7. Hobart Feb 13, 14. Commences Feb 21

THEATRE ROYAL (146 886)

On Tour: Harmon Corvus with Esaki Thornton. Feb 24-28

For further contact Anne Campbell on (049) 67 4778

VIC

THEATRE

ARENA THEATRE (24 9687)

Touring schools. *Mifunes* devised by the Country Belgrade TIE team. *Where Men*

Musson devised by the Popular Theatre Troupe

ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (329-4329)

Touring Secondary schools: *Mr Judd Melbourne Contemporary Jazz on Duo* With Keith Houston and Tony David Touring Upper Primary and Lower Secondary: *Passions AM* with Philip Asle and Paul Williamson Touring Primary and Kindergarten: *Soundscapes* Sound effects and music from the Lightning Creek Trio

COMEDY CAFE (419 2866)

Original comedy entertainment with Rod Quastock

COMEDY THEATRE (043 3233)

Then To Flaming Our Song by Neil Simon, Starring Jackie Weaver and John Waters. Directed by Philip Cusack. Musical Direction by Dale Rensland. Set design by Douglas W Schmidt. Throughout Feb

DRAMA RESOURCE CENTRE (347 347-3449)

To D Or Not To D The transition programme by the Beaumarre street TIE team. Throughout Feb

FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (40-3737)

The Cox and Pave Show with Tony Richards, Simon Thorpe and Tom Edwards. Throughout Feb

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (043 3210)

The Best Little Whore House in Town with Lorraine Bayly and Alfred Sander. From Feb 7

LA MAMA (347-6885)

Art Productions Presents

To End God's Judgement by Artand. With Bruce Keller. Directed by Jean Pierre Magnan

Quick Death To Jefferson by Richard Murphy. Directed by Greg Carter. To Feb 22

A Script For Four Friends by Graham Serrano. Directed by Rex Jones. Feb 26

Mar 15

LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (819-6228)

Monna's Little Horror Show devised and directed by Nigel Triller. From Feb 18. MILL THEATRE COMPANY (052 32-2518)

Regular Community Activities. Run of the Mill Troupe Workshops. Mill night. Participatory events for all ages

MURRAY RIVER PERFORMING GROUP (040 21 3613)

Family Circus Show with the clown ensemble, directed by Mark Sharrock. Feb 11 to 28. School Workshops for handicapped children with Aida Gensse. Feb 20 to 22.

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (624-4000)

Athenaeum Theatre

Mourning Becomes Electric by Eugene O'Neil. Directed by Michael Blakemore. Designed by Tanya McCallin. To March

28.

Russell Street Theatre

Just One Last Dance by Robert Hewitt. Directed by John Sommer. Designed by Tanya McCallin. To Feb 7

The Man From Malabar by Dorothy Hewitt. Directed by Judith Alexander. Designed by Anna Forsyth. Feb 11 to April 13.

Athenaeum 2

The Month by Jean Genet. Directed by Elizabeth Alexander. Designed by Christopher Smith. Feb 21 to 28

PHOENIX THEATRE BURWOOD STATE COLLEGE THEATRE WORKS (283-0444)

One Jai Pave by Peter Somerville. Directed by Richard Murphy. With Hanne Rayford, Cui Howard, Amanda Ma, Susan Foster, and Peter Farley. Touring College and University Campuses throughout Feb

WEST COMMUNITY THEATRE

COMPANY (370-7030)

Touring Club Show

Just A Simple Ride with Phil Samner, Ian Shivers and Greg Sandles. Directed by Phil Thomson. Throughout Feb

DANCE

AUSTRALIAN CONTEMPORARY DANCE COMPANY (341-8465)

Touring Metropolitan Schools Education Programmes Ringwood Civic Centre. *Arabesque Dance Works*. Feb 5-12

Public performances from Feb 16 to 28. Touring Universities and Colleges from Feb 23 to 27

NATIONAL THEATRE (534-0231)

Wild Swans with the Australian Dance Theatre. Opens Feb 27

MOVING ARTZ (419-3903)

Workshops in Feldkirch and Amstutz with Hans Wigman. From Feb 14 to Mar 1. For further information phone Jim Fudale on 409 3993

For further contact Connie Kremer on 267 3928

WA

THEATRE

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

(321-6288)

The Old Vic Theatre Company presents

The Merchant Of Venice by William Shakespeare. Director, Michael Moschman. Designer, Adrian Vaux. With Timothy West and Prunella Scales. Feb 13-Mar 8 and Feb 28-Mar 3

Twelfth Of The Month by Sir Arthur Pinero. Director, Timothy West. Feb 20-27

HOLE IN THE WALL (381-2403)

Stuff by Alexander Baro. Feb 3-28

NATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY (32513000)

Playhouse. *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer. Director, Stephen Barry. Designer, Tony Trapp. With Edgar Melville and Robert Van Marckenborg. Feb 4-28

OCTAGON THEATRE

Off And On with Timothy West and Prunella Scales. Feb 21, 24-27

J. Colmanusson. Feb 9-28

PERTH ACTOR'S COMPANY

St George's Hall. *Wings* by Arthur Kopit. Director and Designer, Ken Campbell-Dobson. With Margaret Arkstell. Feb 11-15, 18-22, 25-Mar 1

REGAL THEATRE (381-6288)

Throughout Feb 25-Mar 21

The Marconette Theatre of Australia presents: *The Magic Building* by Norman Lindsay and Eleanor Whitcomb. Director, Richard Brodshaw. Feb 4-21

UNIVERSITY OF WA

Zagreb Theatre Company presents: *The Liberation Of Skopje* by Osman Ivanovski. Director, Lyubomir Kostic. Feb 9-14

WA THEATRE COMPANY (330-7030)

Hayman Theatre. *Faint* written and directed by Peter Wilson. Feb 7-28

DANCE

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

(321-6288)

Arabesque Dance Theatre. Feb 3, 6, 7 and 9, 10, 11

OCTAGON THEATRE

Steps, Notes And Squares devised by Maana Gelpud. Choreographer, Michael Manning. Musical director, Justin Slater. Feb 23-28

PERTH ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE

Balloon Dance Program arranged and produced by Sam Gidelson. Feb 21

OPERA

PLAYHOUSE

From Le Marius. For Le Parole by Salim F. Feb 7, 12-14, 18-21, 26-28

For further reviews: Jean Ambrose on 266619

Playbox

Season 1/1981

THE CHOIR by ERROL BRAY

from March 18

BLEEDIN' BUTTERFLIES by DOREEN CLARKE from April 2

I SENT A LETTER

TO MY LOVE by BERNICE RUBENS

from April 29

DANCE OF DEATH by AUGUST STRINDBERG
translation by Roger Pulver

from May 21

LETTERS HOME by ROSE LEIMAN GOLDBERG from June 10

PLAYBOX

THEATRE COMPANY

11-12 CHURCH STREET HILLGARDENE 2000 42 4288



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